# The MAD BUSMAN

I·A·R· WYLIE

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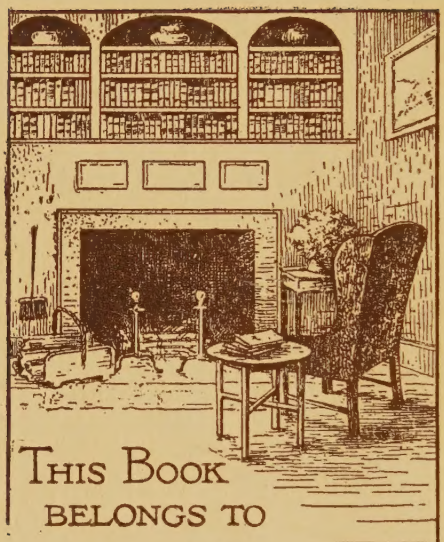

THIS BOOK
BELONGS TO

Rhoda Corwin Klugh.

BERTRAND SMITH'S
"ACRES OF BOOKS"
633 MAIN ST.

# *The Mad Busman*

*I. A. R. Wylie*

*BY THE SAME AUTHOR*

*Black Harvest*
*The Shining Heights*
*The Dark House*
*Towards Morning*
*Etc., etc.*

# *The Mad Busman*

*And Other Stories*

*By*

*I. A. R. Wylie*

*New York*
*George H. Doran Company*

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*The Mad Busman and Other Stories*
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# *The Mad Busman*

## I

## *The Mad Busman*

### I

THERE are quite a number of persons in this story. First and foremost there is Elfreda, who might be described as "The Woman in the Case"; then there is Mrs. Melrood with her attendant vestal Sarah, Mrs. Judd, of Rosemary Lane, a policeman, a frightened bus conductor, a stout gentleman and, of course, Mr. Gudgeon himself, with whose mysterious and extraordinary fate the story is primarily concerned. Nor must we forget the Twenty Ragamuffins. These may be regarded as a sort of Greek chorus, though unlike most Greek choruses their comments will be noted for simplicity and directness. To describe each individually would be tiresome. Suffice to say that they were ragamuffins and very raggy at that.

Mrs. Judd was Mrs. Judd of Rosemary Lane because she had lived there longer than any of the other inhabitants and knew more about them than

they knew themselves and much more than they liked.

Mr. Gudgeon, for instance, she had known ever since he had first come to Rosemary Lane as a red-haired, freckled-nosed young man, with a rosy complexion which was positively startling among the Lane's drab-faced population, and a pair of astonished, rather foolish, blue eyes. In those days Mr. Gudgeon drove the old Atlas horse-bus from Camden Town to London Bridge, and drove it as well as any man in London for all that he was such a slow-moving, slow-spoken fellow. Later the red hair had become a sandy halo round a shiny bald head, and the rosy complexion a veined and weather-beaten purple, and the horse-bus a thundering, roaring, bustling motor juggernaut. It was the latter change that had marked the turning point in Mr. Gudgeon's development. Mrs. Judd could tell you all about that, for hadn't he lodged with her faithfully without a grumble for thirty years? In fact, what Mrs. Judd didn't know about Mr. Gudgeon could have been put on a postage stamp.

"It was them there motor-buses begun it," she told her listeners lounging on her doorstep in the cool of a summer's evening, and savouring the tragedy with a gloomy relish unblunted by familiarity with many a like incident in the Lane's history. "Up to then 'e was as nice-spoken, pleasant sort of chap as you could wish to meet—not larky, mind you. Always a bit on the quiet side, as you might say, but 'appy as a bird. I can 'ear 'im now, whistlin' to 'im-

self about the 'ouse and 'is talk about 'is 'orses. Always full of 'is 'orses, 'e was. 'Sarah Jane's off her feed to-day, Mrs. Judd,' 'e'd tell me, or, 'Sarah Jane's goin' like a three-year-old.' Sarah Jane being 'is favourite. If she'd been 'is own child 'e couldn't 'ave fussed more. And then them there motor-buses!"

"Drat 'em all!" said Mrs. Piggot piously.

Not that Mr. Gudgeon had failed in any way. He had faced the change manfully, carrying over into his new job that feeling for a wayward creature's moods and tempers without which no man can become a successful motor-driver. He had even transplanted his affection and tended it with a kind of passionate absorption which had first given Mrs. Judd the idea that he was going "queer."

"It weren't natural," she declared, "calling a bloomin' old bus Gwendoline and pattin' it on its 'ead and talkin' to it as though it were a Christian. I didn't 'old with it and I told 'im so. Much good that did. When a man goes queer he's queer and there ain't no helping 'im."

Except that he had grown more silent, a trifle more foolish-looking as though life were a sort of worsted ball in which he had got himself hopelessly involved, Mrs. Judd had had no reason to complain. He never drank, he paid his way regularly. Except for one desperate bout with pneumonia and Mrs. Judd's ideas of hygiene, he had never missed a day's work.

"Reg'lar as a clock. Every morning there 'e'd be

at the pub waiting for 'is precious Gwendoline to roll up. Every evening 'e'd come 'ome sober as a judge. If it 'adn't been for 'is betting 'e'd 'ave been too good to be true. But 'e would bet. Every week 'e'd 'ave 'is shilling on. Not but what 'e was queer about that too. Win or lose, 'e didn't seem to care. I used to say to 'im, I said, 'It ain't 'uman, Mr. Gudgeon, the way you loses. Why don't you swear or 'it something like a man?' And he just gaped. 'It's the 'orses I cares about, Mrs. Judd,' 'e said, 'just the 'orses.' I said, 'Well, it ain't 'uman and no good'll come of it, mark my words.' "

Mrs. Piggot wiped a rheumy eye with the corner of her shawl.

"And now 'e's gorn, poor feller."

II

Elfreda lived in the top room of the last and most decrepit house in Rosemary Lane. It ought to have been a very cheerful room, for it was inhabited not only by Elfreda but by Mrs. Golightly and Mrs. Golightly's husband and her three bouncing boys, and all these people were highly temperamental by nature, which accounted, no doubt, for the fact that the window panes of the one window had had to be plastered up with brown paper, and that none of the three chairs were really to be relied on. Mr. Golightly was a house-painter by profession and an artist by instinct. The artist tended to come home in the small hours singing at the top of a shaky bari-

tone in the sheer joy of life, and the house-painter who rolled out of his frowsy bed the next morning was a surly person who would as soon throw a boot as look at you.

To Elfreda both personages were about equally terrifying.

Mrs. Golightly, on the other hand, was a practical, vigorous woman. She believed in "everybody pulling 'is weight in the 'ome," and as Elfreda weighed exactly four stone Mrs. Golightly had no opinion of her pulling powers. And she had a playful way of expressing her opinion which left Elfreda not quite sure whether she were standing on her head or her feet for hours afterwards. Mrs. Golightly was not Elfreda's mother, for which fact Mrs. Golightly gave Heaven constant and eloquent thanks. Elfreda herself didn't know where she came from or where she was going to, and didn't think about it. Being so small, it took her all her time to stay where she was. In the morning, according to the behests of a beneficent Government, she went to school, and for the rest of the day, according to the vigorous Mrs. Golightly, she made flowers. It was wonderful the way she made flowers, because it was a fact that except for a few bedraggled peonies on a costermonger's barrow she had never seen any. Her teachers remarked, when they remarked her at all, that little Elfreda was backward. But then they had never met her on her high stool by the attic window trying to catch the last gleam of the dirty afternoon light over the tumbled chimneys, the

stumpy chilblained fingers making marvellously life-like rosebuds out of strips of pink silk and the contents of a paste pot. They might even have been astonished had they seen her later still, under the candlelight, not quite so steady on her perch, the intent small face a shade grubbier, the blue little fingers a shade bluer, making daffodils.

That was what Mrs. Golightly meant by "pulling one's weight."

As a matter of fact, her teachers didn't think much about Elfreda. There were so many children in that particular school who had holes in their stockings and frost-bitten snub noses that she was not interesting.

III

Gwendoline, officially known as No. 47X, began her career at The Crown, and, having made her devious way across London, drew up in a rather overheated state at the top of Hill Rise, the outpost of a melancholy suburb and guarded by The King's Arms, where Mr. Gudgeon and his brethren gathered strength for the return journey. What lay beyond that barrier of seedy and tawdry villas Mr. Gudgeon did not know. Very often he stood by Gwendoline's side, waiting for the signal from the inspector, and looked outwards into a vague vista of open fields and struggling farm-houses that were being overtaken and stifled by the urban octopus. But his expression betrayed no curiosity. He had

brought Gwendoline to her journey's end and he had to take her back again, avoiding the pedestrians seeking slaughter under her wheels and keeping to the company's time. That was Mr. Gudgeon's business in life. Life, if you were one of the lucky ones, consisted in doing to-day what you did yesterday and what you hoped to do to-morrow. Change meant misfortune, illness or losing your job or getting into trouble with the police. You got up in the morning and washed and ate a rasher of bacon swilled down with a cup of Mrs. Judd's stewed tea. Then you smoked a pipe, and at eight sharp you were at The Crown waiting for Gwendoline. And when she drew up, snorting, from her early morning run, you climbed aboard with your tool-box and wrapped yourself in your blanket, and patted her secretly so that she should know that there was going to be no more of that brutal gear-grinding. Sometimes you took the first trip of all. Then you didn't wash so much and you fried your bacon yourself, and had the privilege of coaxing Gwendoline out of an ice-cold stupor into a state of purring, rumbling content (which no one could do better and quicker than Mr. Gudgeon). Sometimes you had a morning off, and sometimes an evening. If it was an evening you drowsed over Mrs. Judd's kitchen fire, and if it was a morning you stayed in bed. On race days you put a shilling "on" with the drawer at The Crown just to reassure yourself that " 'orses were still 'orses" somewhere in the world, and on Sunday morning, whatever happened, you changed your shirt.

That was life. Everybody's life.

Some men, of course, had wives and children. Or they took to drink. Once Mr. Gudgeon himself had had a love affair but that had been a long time ago, way back in the village whence he came and whose name he had almost forgotten. Nothing had come of it. For Mr. Gudgeon, like so many red-headed, freckled-nosed people, was awkward and diffident. And so he had just "settled down." He had become rather like his favourite, Sarah Jane, who had settled down so completely that she had almost walked into her harness and knew every stop on the road, and would slow up without being told the minute the bell rang or a would-be passenger on the pavement waved an umbrella. Mr. Gudgeon used to declare that she could have found her way from Camden Town to London Bridge in her sleep. And he could have done as much himself. That was the best way to live, jogging along, doing things "regular" so that you didn't know you were doing them or why.

Instead of a wife and children or the drink Mr. Gudgeon had Gwendoline. Gwendoline was the little fire on Mr. Gudgeon's secret hearth. He loved her, and though he never thought about it, not being a reflective person, he was certain that she liked him best. There was an understanding between them. He knew her ways: when she liked to be "changed down," how to coax her up Hill Rise, and when, in spite of the garage expert, she was feeling "below par." Unlike the other drivers he never left her to

freeze stiff in the bitter winter blasts whilst he warmed himself before the fire at The King's Arms, but covered her radiator with his own blanket. He never ground her gears in rage because some exasperating passenger had made them stop twice in twenty yards, or sent her sliding and curveting in nervous panic on a slippery pavement. And in return she had never failed him. Even when suffering cruelly from neglected plugs she had been known to limp home with a full cargo rather than that he should be stranded and miss his supper.

Mr. Gudgeon did not always drive her. Sometimes he drove her sisters, conscientiously but without tenderness, and when he met her on the road, bustled along by some heavy-handed bully, he gave her a little secret nod of recognition. Once he had passed her broken down by the wayside, her bonnet up, and the same ass of a fellow digging her in the ribs in the effort to goad her back to life, and he had felt sore and miserable for the rest of the day. Just to save himself from official reproof he had failed a friend in the hour of need, and for the first time in his patient, uncomplaining life a tiny point of anger and protest flickered up in him.

"If I'd 'ave stopped they'd 'ave sacked me," he explained to her. And Gwendoline had understood. Gwendoline knew what "them inspectors" were like. She knew what life was. You had to keep "on time," and sooner or later they'd scrap you, anyhow.

And because of Gwendoline Mr. Gudgeon did not know that he was a lonely little man, growing old.

IV

To Elfreda Mr. Gudgeon was a man and Gwendoline a bus and both therefore were to be avoided. Men came home drunk at night and threw things at you, and buses were roaring monsters that threatened your life every time you tried to cross the street. And yet they were fascinating, too. When Elfreda with her companion Ragamuffins came out of school they had to linger outside The Crown just to watch Mr. Gudgeon wrap himself in his blanket and climb on board. There was something unspeakably romantic and adventurous about this solemn setting out for you didn't know where. Elfreda, lurking timidly on the outskirts of the crowd, used to try and spell out the stream of names which Gwendoline carried on her sign-board, and when she came to Hill Rise a wonderful shiver ran up and down her backbone. It was like a magic word that conjured up vague visions of a fairy-tale country. Not that Elfreda knew anything about fairy tales. But she was sure in her tired, chilblained little mind that Hill Rise was different from anything she had ever known. It was a place, very high up, somewhere beyond the chimney-pots, and there Mr. and Mrs. Golightly were not. And its greatest attraction was that you could go on sleeping there just as long as you wanted with no one to shake you by the arm till your bones cracked. "Nah then, get up, you good-for-nothing lazy brat!"

One of the Ragamuffins who had been as far afield

as Epping Forest opined that there were trees there, " 'undreds and 'undreds of them," but no one really believed him. There were no trees within a three-mile radius of Rosemary Lane, so that " 'undreds and 'undreds" of them in one place sounded highly incredible and rather alarming. Besides, the Ragamuffin was a bad boy and a notorious liar.

Of course, Mr. Gudgeon could have unravelled the mystery at once, but then Elfreda would no sooner have spoken to him than asked Mr. Golightly not to sing or throw his boots at her. True, Mr. Gudgeon looked quiet enough, but with men you never could tell. Mrs. Golightly herself boasted that her first husband, being a real gentleman, had thrown her downstairs without so much as lifting his voice. So it was best to keep on the safe side, and when Mr. Gudgeon came out of The Crown with his blanket and said, "Now, you kids," every one withdrew to a respectful distance, and only the boldest Ragamuffin piped out feebly, "Give us a ride, mister?"

## V

Still, it was Elfreda, generally considered both backward and poor-spirited, who made the great discovery. One dripping winter's evening Mrs. Golightly, according to custom, became depressed and depression developing into "an 'orrible sinking feeling," Elfreda was hustled out with a mug for the only known remedy. And it was whilst trying to

edge through the swing doors of the public-house without spilling her beery burden that she saw Mr. Gudgeon talking to Gwendoline. There was no mistake possible. He even patted her, running his hand over her black wing with a lingering tenderness that made Elfreda gulp loudly, she did not in the least known why. Whereupon Mr. Gudgeon turned and became red and embarrassed, and said, "Now then," very severely. For even he knew that it is not usual to talk to motor-buses, and the terror of being "sacked" for queerness was a very real one, and made him add, "'Oo are you a-starin' at?" with quite terrible indignation. But for once Elfreda was not dismayed. Light had come to her. She knew now that No. 47X was not a terrifying monster at all. It was an amiable monster. You could speak to it and even pat it without danger. And Mr. Gudgeon was a nice man who was kind when no one else was looking. So she came a little nearer, with her mug clasped between two blue and grubby hands, and said, "I dunno," without a tremor.

Mr. Gudgeon stared at Elfreda. He wasn't given to seeing people in detail. Kids were kids. Sometimes they were "young varmints." That was all he knew about them. It was as though Elfreda had stepped out of a fog with her red-button nose shining plaintively in the midst of her small white face and her eyes round with permanent bewilderment.

"Ought ter be in bed," said Mr. Gudgeon. "Where's yer mother?"

"I dunno."

"Well, run 'ome to 'er. Ought ter be in bed hours ago."

Elfreda felt that there were things Mr. Gudgeon did not understand.

"I don't go to bed," she said, "not for hours and hours."

"Oh, you don't, eh? And why not?"

"'Cos I'm working."

"Tush!" said Mr. Gudgeon. "Wot work?"

"Makin' things."

"Wot things?"

"F-flowers."

"Well, I never 'eard tell of any one makin' flowers." Mr. Gudgeon concealed his scepticism tactfully. "'Ere, warm those paws of yours a bit, any 'ow. I'll 'old your beer for you. Put 'em there."

She did as he bade her. By stretching up she was able just to touch the top of Gwendoline's radiator, and an almost overpowering wave of comfort poured over her tense shivering little body. She said huskily:

"'Oo—it's alive, ain't it?"

Mr. Gudgeon looked shy.

"Well, I dunno, in a sort of way."

"Like 'orses."

"What d'you know about 'orses?"

"I dunno."

"Well, 'orses is 'orses. She's a bus."

"Wot's 'er name?"

Mr. Gudgeon blushed.

"Well, I calls 'er Gwendoline."

"I likes 'er," Elfreda said, " 'cause she's warm."

Mr. Gudgeon tried to look casual and indifferent.

"Oh, she ain't a bad sort, as buses go." Then in a burst of loyalty: "There ain't many of 'em can go up 'Ill Rise like she do, I can tell you that, any'ow."

So after all the great question came quite easily.

"Where's 'Ill Rise, mister?"

" 'Ill Rise? It's a might of a way from 'ere. Straight across London as far as you can go. Three hours accordin' to schedule."

"And are there trees, lots and lots of 'em?"

Mr. Gudgeon was about to explain that Hill Rise was just a pub as far as he was concerned, but at that moment he caught sight of the upturned face and it was so small and white and eager that in a burst of intuition he lied.

"Trees enough."

"And f-flowers?"

"P'r'aps. I don't 'ave much time for pickin' 'em. What d'you want to know for, seeing as 'ow you make 'em yourself?"

As a pleasantry the question fell flat.

"I dunno," said Elfreda in a dull little voice.

"Ort ter be in bed," Mr. Gudgeon remarked crossly. "Look at the rain drippin' into your ma's beer. What's yer name?"

"Elfreda."

"Elfreda, there's a name for you, 'Elf,' that's about wot you look like."

"Wot's an elf, mister?"

"Blessed if I know. Something that sort of 'ops about."

"I don't 'op, mister."

"Well, you ort ter. And 'op quick, too. 'Ere's the inspector comin'."

This time Elfreda fled, slip-slopping through the puddles and the mist of rain like a scared little phantom. And presently, his last shift over, Mr. Gudgeon went home and Mrs. Judd gave him a description of the Golightly *ménage,* whereat Mr. Gudgeon swore. And as Mr. Gudgeon never swore, Mrs. Judd marked the occasion as the beginning of the end.

## VI

So from being the least and most despised of Ragamuffins Elfreda became an important person. She and Gwendoline and Mr. Gudgeon knew each other. Whilst the other Ragamuffins stood round in an awed circle, Elfreda warmed her stubby fingers on Gwendoline's friendly radiator, and Mr. Gudgeon, climbing into his place, threw pleasantries at her which she did not always understand but which lent her immense prestige. And gradually a deep intimacy sprang up between the three of them, a sort of wordless understanding. They began to look forward to seeing one another. And it was comforting to think about one another when you were looking over the tumbled sea of chimney-pots or staring over

the bleak prospect from Hill Rise and wishing there were really a few trees there worthy of the name.

At least that was how Elfreda and Mr. Gudgeon felt. No one knew what Gwendoline felt. She said nothing.

Things changed. Winter melted into a warm and kindly spring, and one became restless and inclined to fall into a kind of dazed dream about one didn't know what. One didn't make one's roses and daffodils so quickly, and Mrs. Golightly's depressions were more frequent and more painful in their expression. Mr. Gudgeon's little flicker of anger became a small smouldering furnace. He didn't know, either, what he was angry about. But he was gruff to the inspectors and said rude things under his breath about tiresome passengers and people who tried to get him into trouble by making Gwendoline run them over (which was what they richly deserved). And altogether matters were getting very strained and critical when the most amazing thing of all happened.

One dusky April evening Elfreda and her mug of beer came out of the stifling, evil-smelling bar and found Mr. Gudgeon crying. It sounds incredible and probably any one else would not have noticed it. But Elfreda knew too much about crying. She knew how to cry without making a noise and even without shedding tears, and Mr. Gudgeon's puckered face in the light of Gwendoline's lamps was unmistakable. Elfreda let her mug fall and Mr. Gudgeon turned.

"Now you've gone and done it," he croaked.

Oddly enough Elfreda didn't seem to care. She said, " 'Ullo!" tentatively and came and stood close to him, rubbing herself against his sleeve like some small friendly animal, and Mr. Gudgeon put his hand on her shoulder and squeezed till it hurt.

"Well, that's that, Elfy."

"Wot's wot?"

"Scrapped." He pointed to Gwendoline standing mute and, for a bus, oddly dejected-looking by the curb. "Scrapped. Going to the knackers. Like Sarah Jane. Like the lot of us. Got to make way for the new-fangled ones. Well, it'll be me next. That's life, Elfy."

"Yus," said Elfreda.

He gave her a little push. He didn't want even her to see him so broken-down.

"You get along home. Tell 'er I did it. 'Ere's twopence to buy some more. Don't you fret."

Elfreda looked at Mr. Gudgeon and then at Gwendoline. It was true, as her teachers said, that her tired, frost-bitten little brain didn't work quickly, but that this mute tragedy was life she hadn't the smallest doubt. Also she knew that there was no use talking about it. The best thing you could do was to do as you were told as best you could. So she left Mr. Gudgeon standing there, and explained to Mrs. Golightly about the beer, and Mrs. Golightly, whose depressions had become positively homicidal in the delay, accused her of having drunk

it herself and beat her with the first thing which came handy, which happened to be a broken broomstick.

That was life too.

As a punishment Elfreda sat up until midnight making roses and the candle guttered and she fell asleep, and the next morning the roses revealed themselves as a hideous failure. All except one. That one Elfreda, nerved by desperation, slipped into the bosom of her dirty jumper and crept downstairs into the dawn, whilst the Golightlys' snores pursued her, thick with menance.

## VII

"He's getting past his work," thought the inspector.

" 'Ere," said Elfreda.

The inspector went into the pub to tell the bus conductor that it was high time 47X was on its way. A stout gentleman with a heavy gold watch-chain settled himself comfortably in the inside corner away from draughts. Mr. Gudgeon paused on his upward climb. He looked, as the inspector judged, a little old man. He hadn't shaved and there was a sort of baffled, gone-to-seed air about him. No self-respecting bus company could have thought of retaining such a person on their pay-roll.

"Eh?" said Mr. Gudgeon.

" 'Ere," Elfreda repeated.

It was all she had to give, the only thing that was

really her own. And Mrs. Golightly would certainly kill her for stealing it. That didn't matter much. Even Elfreda knew that you could only be killed once, and in a sort of way it would be nice to get it over.

"I made it."

Mr. Gudgeon took the pink object held up to him. He tried to smile.

"Well I never, did you now?"

"It's a rose, mister."

"Like as two pins," said Mr. Gudgeon.

Light came into the dull, red-rimmed eyes.

"Is it?"

"Is it wot?"

"Like."

"Don't you know?"

"I never seen none."

Mr. Gudgeon put it in his button-hole with clumsy shaking fingers.

Then for the first time he really looked at Elfreda.

"Elfy, she didn't beat you, did she?"

"Yus, a bit."

"Gawd!" said Mr. Gudgeon piteously. "Wot can a man do?"

Elfreda didn't know. She wanted to say that it didn't much matter what any one did. She was going to be killed for certain. But it was comforting to see the rose in Mr. Gudgeon's button-hole. She couldn't understand why he had begun to tremble all over.

"What can I do, Elfy?"

"I dunno. I—I couldn't come along too, could I? I—I'd like to come. I'd like to see them trees."

"Gawd!" said Mr. Gudgeon again. "Much as my job's worth."

"Just them trees," she repeated humbly. "Just once."

Mr. Gudgeon climbed into his seat. The bus conductor had come out, a young man, pert and self-important.

"Got to get a move on," he said. "Late already."

Mr. Gudgeon wrapped himself in his blanket. Rage blazed up in him. The cool spring wind fanned it. It brought across the waste of sooty, crowded houses the forgotten scent of fields. Rage against the inspector and the bus conductor, against life, against the Golightlys and all people who beat children and animals, rage against the Stout Gentleman, who so obviously ate too much, and against all the damned monotony of things.

Mr. Gudgeon put in his clutch. Loosened his brakes. It was to be his and Gwendoline's last journey together. After that she was to be broken up, her brave heart and limbs scattered to the four winds. Like everything that was faithful and loyal and that one loved.

"Give us a ride, mister?"

Mr. Gudgeon blinked at the crowd of white upturned faces. They weren't just "varmints" now. He saw them separately. They were all Elfredas and embryo Mr. Gudgeons, little human beings that

were being brought to serve some faceless senseless tyrant and to be tossed aside when their day was done. They clamoured, "Give us a ride, mister?" as if they were clamouring for the moon. There wasn't a real hope among them.

It was then Mr. Gudgeon went mad. He leant over Gwendoline's side.

"If you want a ride, get in," he said.

VIII

Nobody could have blamed the bus conductor. By the time he had recovered his presence of mind No. 47X was well under way and there was nothing to do but go in and say, "Fares, plez," as though twenty-one Ragamuffins were normal freight. The Stout Gentleman said, "One twopenny," and added, "I think the man is driving much too fast. I shall write to the company," and Elfreda, who was sitting next him, breathless and bewildered, said nothing.

" 'Ere, where's yer fare?"

Elfreda could only gaze and gaze. Her legs were so much too short for the seat that she had to cling to the Stout Gentleman, who twitched irritably and nearly threw her off her balance. The other Ragamuffins piped in chorus, " 'E said we was to" (which was neither grammatical nor illuminating), and pointed at Mr. Gudgeon's head, just visible through the glass partition. The bus conductor grew red with anger. He was a very smart bus conductor who kept his brass buttons shiny and wore his cap over

one ear and he felt that he had been made game of. He rang the bell furiously.

"A lot of young scamps. I've 'alf a mind to get the perlice on yer."

He rang again. Several times. Finally, as he was young and impatient, the cord broke. The Stout Gentleman said:

"Much too fast. What's the matter with the man? It's disgraceful," and the bus conductor opened the little glass window over Mr. Gudgeon's head and shouted: "Can't yer hear? Wot the hell do you think you're doing?" quite regardless of manners. Then he ran upstairs and leant over the edge of the railing and yelled, "Hi, hi!" and came rattling downstairs again and hung out from the edge of the steps still yelling, "Hi, hi!" in a way that suggested that nothing in the bus company's regulations had prepared him to meet such an emergency.

For by this time it was apparent to the meanest intelligence that Mr. Gudgeon and Gwendoline were running away together.

"There'll be an accident," said the Stout Gentleman. "I shall write to the papers."

"You wait," said the bus conductor between his teeth as he shook his fist at the Twenty-one Ragamuffins who were punching each other with excitement. "You wait." He was prepared now to take extreme measures without regard for any one.

The first policeman signalled to was a stout man and hopelessly out-classed by Gwendoline, who by

this time had got warmed to a good thirty miles an hour. The second, Constable X2, happened to be the best runner of his division, and he landed on Gwendoline's backstep with the thunder of regulation boots and fourteen stone of stalwart English manhood. He and the bus conductor consulted rapidly. Then the police, efficient and magisterial, stalked down between the double row of silent and depressed Ragamuffins. For of course everything was over. Whenever the Law appeared everything nice always was over. Whatever you were doing you just naturally took to your heels. The policeman opened the glass window.

"Look here, my man, you pull up at once."

Mr. Gudgeon could not possibly have mistaken the accents of authority. Gwendoline gathered speed.

"You're under arrest," said the policeman.

"He's mad," said the Stout Gentleman. "Why don't you do something instead of talking rubbish."

"And don't you try no interfering of me in the performance of my dooties," said the policeman, pink and threatening. "I'm in charge 'ere, and when I wants your 'elp, sir, I'll ask for it."

"You won't get it," the Stout Gentleman retorted. "And I'll report you."

And from that moment, most unreasonably, he took sides with Mr. Gudgeon.

The policeman strode back down the gangway. Apparently he did not notice the Ragamuffins at all. They were beneath notice. He was so large and wise

and wonderful that no doubt every one, including the Stout Gentleman, seemed to exist just for him to keep in order and out of mischief. He said to the bus conductor, "It'll be all right. He's coming to the cross-roads. My mate'll stop him."

So he hung out from the side-rail and blew his whistle, and the policeman on point-duty stood out in the middle of the road and held his hand up, and Gwendoline made a sort of skittish side curtsy and was past him and up the hill opposite before you could count twenty.

It was a great shock to every one. Life is made up of illusions, and the illusions about policemen were shattered hopelessly for everybody on board No. 47X. Constable X2 himself and his comrade at the cross-roads were never the same men again. In fact, they retired from the force soon afterwards and became publicans and sinners. But for the moment Constable X2 kept his countenance. He went back to the glass window and shouted into Mr. Gudgeon's ear:

"Look here, my man, you can't do that sort of thing, you know."

And having thus announced the law in unequivocal terms, he explained that he would have to report the whole matter to his superiors, who would no doubt deal with the situation, and jumped clear.

"If you think," shouted the bus conductor hysterically, "that I'm going to be left here with a bloomin' madman and a bunch of kids, you're very much mistaken." He added something about a wife

and children and vanished overboard. Being young and excitable he missed his footing, and the Ragamuffins, standing on the seats and crowding at the door, hardly recognised him as he scrambled up from an inconvenient puddle.

The Ragamuffins whooped with joy.

The Stout Gentleman tried to look aloof and disapproving, but there are circumstances in which all men become brothers. And besides, it was very lonely for him. He said severely:

"*You* seem to be enjoying yourselves, at any rate," and the Twenty said, "Yus—yus!" in ecstatic chorus, and punched each other harder than ever to prove how happy they were. All the pantomimes they had never seen rolled into one could not equal this amazing adventure.

"Ain't it fine!" said Elfreda trustfully.

The Stout Gentleman looked sideways at her and seemed surprised.

"If you had an appointment in the City and were my age you might not think so," he remarked. "And what will your mother say, I should like to know?"

"I ain't got no muvver."

"Why, how old are you?" asked the Stout Gentleman as though an advanced age might explain the deficiency.

"Eight," said Elfreda.

"That's very young—very young," said the Stout Gentleman. "And you're very small. I'm afraid you don't eat enough."

"Will there be trees where we're going, mister?"

"If we continue at this rate and with the present disregard for traffic regulations there will be flowers as well—by request, wreaths of 'em." But it was silly and rather unkind to be satirical with anything so small and desperately in earnest, and when Elfreda said, "Ain't that fine!" the Stout Gentleman was sorry and blew his nose.

"It's a good thing I'm here to look after you," he remarked.

"Yus," said Elfreda.

Gwendoline at this point lurched round and unexpected corner, and the Stout Gentleman got up and spoke to Mr. Gudgeon himself.

"My dear fellow," he said, breathless but propitiating, "I quite understand that you intend this for a treat, but would you mind telling me our destination? I'm not a policeman, and I'm perfectly willing to enter into the spirit of the thing, but I prefer to know——"

Mr. Gudgeon shook his head. He didn't know. That was the whole business. Perhaps Gwendoline knew. He had given her her head. He himself was simply obeying a blind instinct—a homing instinct. Perhaps homing-birds, too, hardly know where they are going when they turn homewards, or how they are going to get there. They just start out blindly and keep on going, as Mr. Gudgeon did. Of course Luck was with him. It was a slack time of the day and the main thoroughfares were fairly clear, and when they weren't Mr. Gudgeon swerved into side streets, which never having seen a bus be-

fore were considerably astonished, and if necessary turned back on himself so that the mounted police got hot on several wrong scents and never so much as caught a glimpse of him. And then Gwendoline played up like the great-hearted gallant creature she was. Her engine sang as she rollicked up the hills, she dodged in and out of slow-moving vehicles like a two-seater. Perhaps she knew. Mr. Gudgeon was sure she knew. This was their first and last adventure. It was to be a great adventure, a desperate splendid break for freedom. And gradually the houses began to fall back like tired out pursuers.

Inside the Ragamuffins were still pounding one another and treading on the Stout Gentleman's toes —all except Elfreda, who had never been a noisy child, perhaps because, as had been suggested, she did not eat enough. She sat very still and looked at the advertisements opposite, at the beautiful fragile ladies who drank Jones's tonic wine when they were more fragile than usual, and at the pink babies brought up on Ambrose's Miliko and who looked as though they were going to burst out of their clothes.

They were like heralds of another world into which she was being hurried. Perhaps one day she too would drink wine out of shining goblets and burst out of her clothes. Anything was possible now. And at last she grew heavy with the unbelievable wonderfulness of it all, and leaning against the Stout Gentleman's arm, she fell asleep.

IX

When she woke up the other world was there, not a world of choiring angels, as the phrase suggests, but much more satisfactory. Elfreda, still leaning snugly against the Stout Gentleman, could see it through the window opposite, miles upon miles of it, hill and valley, field and forest, veiled in a spring mist of ethereal golds and greens. And not a house in sight—if you excepted the thatched cottage before which Gwendoline had halted, with steam blowing from her nostrils, and which was so unlike any house that Elfreda had ever seen before that it didn't count. A gaily lettered sign hung over the porch informing you that "The Case Is Altered" and that you could get Whitney's ale here, and there were real daffodils swaying in a side garden so that for one moment Elfreda imagined that they were *her* daffodils come here to greet her. But a moment afterwards she saw that they were quite different. There was such a glow and brightness about their green and yellow dress.

The Stout Gentleman, who had had to sit very still so that Elfreda should not be disturbed, groaned and stretched himself.

"It seems this is our first halt," he said.

And he lurched out in front of the Twenty Ragamuffins, who were rather tired by this time, and a red-faced man with a green apron round his waist stood in the porch and greeted him very respectfully.

"Sorry, sir. Afraid we can't do much. We

weren't expecting a large party. If you'd only let us know you was coming——"

"I didn't know myself," said the Stout Gentleman grimly. "It was a surprise treat."

"Well, sir, we could do cheese and eggs and sausages and coffee——"

The Ragamuffins rustled and twittered like excited sparrows in a nest.

"Yus—yus."

"We're 'ungry."

"I never 'ad no breakfus' even."

"Give me sawsidges."

The "sawsidges" became a savage chorus.

The Stout Gentleman sighed deeply.

"Well, I suppose so. I can't have 'em starve before my eyes. Though who'll pay me back, I don't know. Do what you can, Landlord, and while we're waiting get me a trunk call to London."

The Landlord smiled rather pityingly.

"No phone here, sir."

"Good God. Well, send round to the police station."

"There *is* a policeman at Little Thornton," the Landlord ruminated doubtfully, "at least I've heard tell of him."

"Is this a civilised country?" the Stout Gentleman demanded of nobody in particular. "Get him anyhow. I refuse any further responsibility." He glared at Mr. Gudgeon. Mr. Gudgeon, driving a full-grown bus thirty miles an hour down the Old Kent Road, had been a god to be propitiated. Mr.

Gudgeon, standing bowed and shabby by his overheated, dusty charge, was just a mad fellow who ought to be put under lock and key. Not that the Stout Gentleman was fundamentally a bully. But he hated bus-rides at the best of times, and he was tired and he had missed an important appointment. "I'm sorry for you," he said. "But I can't help it. You can't do this sort of thing, you know."

He followed the Landlord into his inn, and the Twenty Ragamuffins charged in after him like a pack of yelping puppies.

But Elfreda stayed behind. The keen wind blew through her thin clothes as though they had been made of paper, but she was not cold. In the midst of all this empty immensity she felt smaller and more helpless than she had ever done among the familiar houses and the ceaseless crowds. But she was not afraid. She felt she could have lain down on this kind earth and fallen asleep and it would take care of her.

She went and stood very close to Mr. Gudgeon. To her he was still wonderful. Before him Authority had collapsed like a toy balloon into which he had stuck a contemptuous pin. To her he wasn't a little old man, gone queer in the head, but a hero. And yet the look on his face made her ache all over.

"You ain't a-goin' to cry again, is you, mister?"

"No, my dear."

"Wot's the perliceman comin's for, mister?"

"I dunno, dearie, I dunno."

Her hand crept into his.

"He ain't a-goin' to take us 'ome, is he?"

"'Ome!" said Mr. Gudgeon under his breath. "'Ome!"

"Don't you let 'im, mister; don't you let 'im."

A wild light flashed over the old man's face. He picked Elfreda up and set her by the driver's seat. He gave one strong pull at Gwendoline's starting handle. If she had failed him then! If she had even broken into a warning roar! But she purred softly, triumphantly. "That's right, that's right."

And then they were away again. Not hurrying, for why should any one hurry with not a policeman nearer than Little Thornton? Just meandering up and down hill, along twisting lanes, through avenues of beech trees, luminous with sap. And the spring wind blowing in their earnest faces.

Elfreda sat very close.

"Where are we going now, mister?"

"Gawd knows," said Mr. Gudgeon very reverently.

x

Admittedly this is very late in the story to introduce Mrs. Melrood. But we have classical precedent for the delay. Whoever heard of a *deux ex machina* in the first act? The whole business of such a personage is that he, or she, should appear at the last moment when everybody is at their wit's end how to straighten things out.

Mrs. Melrood lived with Sarah, who was very old, and a couple of half-baked country housemaids

at Melrood Court, which was a fine, tumbledown Georgian house standing in a fine, gone-to-seed park, full of deer and sheep and weeds, and, in fact, anything that could and wanted to flourish there. Mrs. Melrood herself was obstinately poor. If she had chosen she could have sold Melrood for twice its value to any one of a dozen war-time millionaires itching to live somewhere where they didn't belong; and with the proceeds she could have settled down to a luxurious and respectable old age in Kensington. Not that any one could have imagined her in Kensington. Mrs. Melrood, rheumatics and all, could still ride to hounds over the worst county in England with the best of them, and her language, when roused, would have shattered the bric-à-brac of a Kensington drawing-room to fragments. In the daytime she wore shabby tweeds and a high collar and a deer-stalker, and in the evening very punctiliously she changed into what one can only describe as tailor-made *decolleté*. So attired and oddly imposing with her acquiline profile and cropped snow-white hair she sat alone at the head of an oak table, spread with linen and the finest silver, and partook of a mutton chop or a stew from yesterday's joint. Opposite her, shadowy, almost living in the flickering candlelight, were full-length portraits of three men in uniform. These Mrs. Melrood toasted regularly in a glass of ancient port.

The neighbouring villages reckoned her slightly mad and loved her. For she belonged to them.

Now on the night of the day on which Mr. Gud-

geon, Elfreda and Gwendoline set out on their great adventure, Mrs. Melrood finished her after-dinner coffee and a gasper in a mood as near melancholy as was possible to a person of her temperament. She was not the sort to ask, "Is life worth living?" or "Why?" and "What's the use?" Still, it was a disagreeable business, this growing old with only one decent horse in the stable so that once a week's hunting was the outside limit, and not a soul, except Sarah, to ask after one's rheumatism. And then Sarah was getting old too.

"Damnably old," Mrs. Melrood reflected, "and short in the wind."

And at that moment Sarah burst in like a panic-stricken colt.

"Oh, ma'am, if you please, ma'am, if you'd come at once—oh, dear, such a shock I've never had. I'd just gone out for a breath of air, and there it was, staring at me, large as life—oh, dear, and it's there this very minute."

"Where?" demanded Mrs. Melrood with splendid calm.

"In the lake, ma'am."

"What's in the lake?"

"A bus, ma'am."

"A what?"

"A bus," Sarah repeated faintly, and sat down regardless of decorum.

"To my certain knowledge," said Mrs. Melrood, "there isn't a bus within fifty miles. My good woman, you must be suffering from a complex——"

"Thirty years I've served you, ma'am," retorted Sarah bitterly, "and God knows I never touched a drop of such a thing."

Mrs. Melrood sighed. She went into the hall and slipped an ulster over the evening dress and armed herself with a stout stick and an electric torch. Any dragon would have quailed before her.

"It's absurd," she said. "But if it's true I won't have it. I hate buses."

However, there it was. Unmistakable. In the pale moonlight it did in fact look rather like some prehistoric monster, a slightly befuddled plesaurus that had floundered into the lake and stuck there ankle-deep in slime. One of Gwendoline's headlights had gone out, and the effect, taken with a distinct list to starboard, was absurdly like a tipsy wink. Mrs. Melrood, from dry land, flashed a light over her sign-board.

"The Crown, Old Kent Road, Hill Rise," she read aloud. "Seems to have come a little out of its way." The torch whisked round to the figure standing close to her. There was a moment's silence. "Oh, it's you, Gudgeon, is it?" said Mrs. Melrood.

Mr. Gudgeon touched his cap.

"Yes, ma'am."

Mr. Gudgeon was wet to the knees. He had driven a hundred miles without food or drink. He had broken innumerable laws and by-laws. It was not certain that he had not stolen. He stood there

bowed and broken and bewildered at himself, no fight left in him, no hope.

"I told you you'd get sick of that rackety town life and want to come back," Mrs. Melrood reminded him. "But I do think you need not have brought a bus into the park. You know how I'd hate the beastly things."

"She ain't the usual sort of bus, ma'am. She's a good sort. She was a real friend to me. And now I've done 'er in."

Mrs. Melrood regarded Gwendoline critically.

"You shouldn't have driven her into the lake, Gudgeon."

"I know, ma'am. I didn't mean to. I got all muddled like. It didn't seem to me the road used to go that way."

"It didn't. Colonel Melrood altered it. That was after your time."

"Yes, ma'am," said Mr. Gudgeon sadly.

"Things have changed, Gudgeon."

"That's true, ma'am."

"The Colonel's gone. Perhaps you heard?"

"Yes, ma'am, I heard."

"And Master John and Robert, together, at Neuve Chapelle."

"I saw it in the papers, ma'am. I didn't write. I was ashamed, like."

He hung his head. He didn't want any one to see that he was crying again. When she had said to him, "You'll come back one of these days, Gud-

geon," she had been young and beautiful. He felt how old and tired he was.

Mrs. Melrood leant cautiously over the strip of water and poked Gwendoline in the ribs.

"I suppose it isn't your bus, is it, Gudgeon?"

"No, ma'am, not so to speak, ma'am."

"You stole it?"

"Yes, ma'am, I s'ppose that's 'ow it seems to most people."

"Well, why any sane person should want to steal a bus——" The torch light wavered and fell a point. "And what on earth is that?" demanded Mrs. Melrood sharply.

"That" was Elfreda.

"It's a little girl, ma'am."

"Your little girl?"

"No, ma'am."

"Eloping, at your ages, really, Gudgeon!"

Elfreda clung to her friend with her last strength. The bright light of the torch blinded her. What lay behind it she did not know: policemen, Mr. and Mrs. Golightly, instant, dreadful destruction (and yet the voice was kind). Elfreda's frozen little legs shook under her. She wasn't a pretty child at any time, and now she looked like a funny white-faced gnome with a red-button nose caught in the act of stealing toadstools, its eyes wide with bewilderment and black-rimmed with dirt and sleepiness.

"It looks very thin," Mrs. Melrood commented. "You haven't been feeding it properly. You shouldn't run away with other people's children.

You don't understand them. Its mother'll be fretting herself to death.

People were always talking about Elfreda's mother.

"She ain't got no mother," Mr. Gudgeon blazed up. "No one, she's got. Only me. They beat 'er. I sees 'er arms, black and blue they was, and I couldn't stand it, I wouldn't stand it. A man goes on and on, like an old bus 'orse, puttin' up with things, seein' 'em 'appen day in, day out, and then all of a suddint 'e can't stand no more. I'd 'ad enough—enough of the whole blasted business. 'I'll go back and die where I belong,' I ses. And when she ses, 'Take me along too, mister,' I ses to 'er, 'You get in.' " He gulped and began to tremble. "Beg pardon, ma'am. It don't matter about me. They'd 'ave scrapped me, any'ow, like they'd scrap 'er, my old Gwendoline. She's rocky in 'er engine and I'm getting queer-like in the 'ead, and that's the truth."

"All the best people are queer in the head, Gudgeon. I am myself."

"But she's such a little 'un. It's an 'ard, long way to go when you're a little 'un and no one caring."

"That's true, Gudgeon."

Mrs. Melrood switched out her torch. "Police after you, I suppose?"

"I make no doubt of it, ma'am."

"Well, damn the police," said Mrs. Melrood cheerfully. She bent down and lifted Elfreda in her arms. "I thought there wasn't any one left,"

she said. "But it seems there's always some one to look after."

Elfreda clung to her drowsily. She was safe now. She was sure of that. Still, it was a good thing to make certain.

"You ain't a-goin' to take me 'ome, missus?"

"Not if I know it, my dear." She remarked over her shoulder: "Your old friend, Sarah, is still with us, Gudgeon."

"Yes, ma'am."

"And there's a good horse in the stable for you."

But Mr. Gudgeon was looking at Gwendoline for the last time. Both lights were out now. He knew that she was dead. And she had died for him. No horse could have been more gallant or more faithful.

"Coming, Gudgeon?"

He touched his cap.

"Coming, ma'am."

There doesn't seem much left to tell, except that Mrs. Melrood was very rude to the police next day and threatened the bus company with an action for trespass. And the bus company apologised, and after they had dragged the lake for Mr. Gudgeon's body and found a few tin cans and an old boot, the police withdrew out of range. They weren't very interested in Mr. Gudgeon, anyhow. The local policeman happening to be a nephew of Mr. Gudgeon's sister-in-law's uncle by marriage, he and the village generally considered that if Mr. Gudgeon

chose to return unexpectedly to his old job as Mrs. Melrood's groom and bring an infant relative with him, that was their business and no concern of a lot of pushing, good-for-nothing Londoners.

Rosemary Lane, on the other hand, knew that Mr. Gudgeon had "made away with himself." Mrs. Judd said so, and what Mrs. Judd said went.

As to Elfreda, being so small, she was forgotten almost at once. Mrs. Golightly, who disliked investigations, said that she had gone to relatives, and Rosemary Lane opined that wherever she was she couldn't be worse off. And the Stout Gentleman, to whom one child was just like another and quite as tiresome, never even missed her.

In any case no one would have recognised her.

For it is amazing how quickly one begins to grow pink and burst out of one's clothes when one is young and happy.

## II

## *Second Vision*

### I

I SAW them last night when they arrived at the hotel, and again this morning in the cathedral. Even without being told I knew what they had come to do. There have been so many pilgrims with the same mission during the last years, and their purpose hangs about them like a solemn but splendid mantle, dividing them from the rest of men. Their son, I remembered, had been killed at Bar-le-Duc. They had come to see his grave—at least, *he* would see it and tell her.

Even to the most casual of us in the lounge last night there was something out of the ordinary about those two—something pathetic, but not pitiful—a dignity and fineness that gave one a better hope of oneself and of one's neighbour. People fell silent as they passed, she leaning upon his arm.

He did not look my way. In any case I doubt very much whether he would have recognised me. After all, it's forty years ago. If he reads this he will remember, of course, and forgive me. It's a breach of confidence, but then I have a notion that he has a simple pride in what has happened—that he

would wish to tell people himself. It would be like laying an exquisite tribute at her feet.

She is beautiful still—I think more beautiful even than that night when she came down the dark oak stairs of her home, a vision of golden youth, bringing our noisy gaiety to an astonished eager silence. Women are like works of art. If they are lovely at heart, age can only deepen their loveliness. If they are tawdry and shallow, their decay is a hideous thing. And Christine Rivers is fine all through. It is true I was in love with her then—for that matter, am still. As she passed me last night—that white-haired woman—my heart began to beat faster, as though it were a boy's heart. And I am an old man.

As to Roger Fenwick, I remember him, too, as he was that night—and how I hated him. Not that he knew I hated him. He was far too triumphantly self-assured, too confident that he had only to hold out his hand for every sort of fruit to drop into it, to doubt for a moment that I was flattered at his friendship for me. I was poor, delicate, not much good at anything except as a judge of old glass—a contemptible accomplishment which made him laugh and was the source of endless good-natured jesting —and I used to wonder whether he chose me out simply to puzzle and tantalise people. But for that he was not subtle enough—and also in his way too proud.

He came from nowhere in particular. His antecedents didn't matter. There he was—an iso-

lated fact not to be denied. At thirty he had made his fortune. Mining, adventuring, gambling with huge stakes. Honestly or dishonestly he had accomplished in the full tide of youth enough to make an old man satisfied. And with that the physique of an athlete and a fair handsomeness saved from brutality—one didn't know quite by what—a steadiness of purpose, perhaps, which cuts out inevitably every sort of waste effort. As to his class—and class still mattered to us at Runners End—he belonged to successful men, and you inquired no further. He rode straight to hounds, committed no social crimes, chiefly, no doubt, because his confidence in himself was absolute, and became without any obvious effort the main feature and interest of our quiet world. The rôle amused him. He liked—figuratively—to take us by the scruff of the neck and toss us over his great shoulders like the insignificant, ineffectual drones that we were. He liked to do better than any of us the things on which we prided ourselves most. Tennis, golf, dancing—these things were natural to him. Because, after all, as he said, you needed only a straight eye and a brain and hand that worked together and worked well. Practise was for cripples.

His approach was announced by the purchase of Norbury Manor, a red-brick gabled eruption of the Victorian era, which had deservedly stood empty for ten years. A party of contractors descended upon the place, disembowelled it, and turned it into a palace of ugly and sometimes funny luxury. There were devices for the saving of effort so intricate that

they made you tired remembering them, and they were peculiarly inappropriate to a man so obviously capable of doing things for himself. But he was very proud of them and used them painstakingly. I think that really they must have worried him a good deal.

You see, it was quite easy to make fun of Roger Fenwick, and some of us did our best. But it was an effort that fell flat. He was altogether too large, too capable of putting any one of us financially, physically, and mentally in his pocket. That which he had not got, and which we had, was a thing too subtle for us to use as a weapon against him. We hardly knew what it was ourselves, and I certainly never supposed that he knew. Still, I might have guessed. There was one indication, at least——

Kings Mead was Christine's home and was divided from Norbury Manor by the high road and a lovely neglected park which remained to her father, Sir Geoffrey, from a once important estate. Fenwick could see it from his smoking-room window, and I remember him taking me by the arm one day and pointing to it with a scornful pipe-stem.

"Queer how people will go on living like that, isn't it? They haven't even got central heating."

"They have other things," I said.

But he brushed me aside, as he always did when I bordered on something he did not understand.

"That old boy, Rivers, is about at the end of his tether, they tell me. He'll have to sell sooner or later. I shall buy the place and throw a bridge over

the road. It wouldn't take much to knock that old barn down and build up some decent stables. I've always hated having the stables near the house."

He went on explaining a new system of telephones which I only half heard. But my ironic fancy pictured him touching some bell which would produce horse and groom through a trapdoor at the breakfast table. For the first time I felt a stirring of anger against him. Up to then I had liked him—as most people did whether they wanted to or not. But there had been something arrogant—aggressive—in his tone as though he had a sort of spite against that lovely tumbled-down jumble of the ages that peered at us through the trees like a sad ghost. It was Christine's home, and Christine was mine as I was hers. Even though we had never spoken, we had known ever since we were children that we belonged to each other.

"You can't do that," I said curtly. "You mustn't."

"Why not?"

"There's Miss Rivers. It would break her heart."

He smiled at me. Expressions like that struck him as comically sentimental and unreal. Only a man who thought stained glass important would be soft enough to use them.

"I knew a fellow who tried to corner wheat and didn't and went off his head," he said. "That's the nearest I've ever come to heart-break. What's this Miss Rivers like, anyway?"

She had been abroad when he came, and he knew

nothing of her except that when people spoke of her it was always with a sudden change of tone, as though she had been a lovely child whom their very voices had to caress.

"You'll see her for yourself," I said. "She'll be back next month. Sir Geoffrey is giving a dance to celebrate. You'll be asked, I've no doubt."

"I've no doubt either. But he would be wiser to save some of his money for his creditors." Then suddenly he lifted his shoulders impatiently. "If she likes living in that drafty old barn, she must be as daft as her father."

"She and I are friends," I warned him.

He met my eyes, angry enough I've no doubt, and he saw through me and made me feel a fool.

"You mean you want to marry her? Well, you'll make a pretty pair, you and your old glass and your Elizabethan horrors. I'd give you Kings Mead for a wedding-present, if only it didn't spoil my view."

And he slipped his arm through mine and dragged me off, boiling with resentment as I was, to see a marvellous new bathroom recently installed.

"All you have to do," he said, "is to set the indicator, and the water will be at the exact temperature. There's no mistake possible. I'll show you."

II

That night ought to have been a triumph for me. I ought to have taken a malicious satisfaction in his overthrow. But I suppose my instinct warned me.

Women meant nothing to him. He had told me that often enough with a sort of boyish pride. They didn't lead anywhere. They just tied you down and messed things up generally. He had seen the results of meddling with women, and so he had cut them out.

Then Christine Rivers came slowly down that broad dark staircase, like a bright burning little flame in her brocaded dress, her hair shining in the despised candlelight, and it was done.

She was late. It is very Christinish to be late—a kind of provocative, unexpected flaw in her consideration and tenderness for others. And I saw the enchanting well-remembered smile appealing to us all, who waited for her, for toleration. I knew that presently she would be explaining to me how it had happened.

"It's my hair, Keith. You know, one day I shall just have to cut it off——"

And then, even if you'd missed a train, you would forgive her.

I wonder now what Roger Fenwick saw that night. It has often puzzled me. Because, after all, he must have met many physically lovelier women in his wanderings. Her essential loveliness lay deeper than her features. It was rare and subtle. If I had to describe it in my limited language I should have to enumerate a lot of strange and seemingly incongruous things—Italian hills in springtime—sunset over the Champagna as you see it from the Sabine hills—a perfect sonnet—some old English

song—the mellow graciousness of ancient things—the first daffodils of the year. These she loved. These were of her and in her. You saw them in her as a still deep water will reflect the shadows of trees and mountains.

But what could Roger Fenwick have seen?

I glanced at him involuntarily. He had taken a step forward out of the group of men with whom he had been standing—an unconsciously arrogant movement as though he had shaken off a tiresome importunity, still more, perhaps, as though he wanted her to realise him at once, the one man who mattered in that crowd of good-natured, easy-going country gentlemen. But he had flushed up to the roots of his fair thick hair, and he never took his eyes from her. It was so brazen, so almost splendidly honest, that admiration of his, that even I could feel no resentment. And she saw him and stopped short on the last step, like some one overtaken by a dream, and waited for him.

Sir Geoffrey, white-haired and dignified, loftily indifferent to the pile of bills that at that very moment must have been loading down his library table, stepped between them. "My dear, I don't think you've met before. This is our new neighbour, Mr. Fenwick."

He took her hand and held it—it seemed to me for an eternity—and she made no effort to free herself. It was like an enchantment, and if it sounds exaggerated and impossible it was none the less true that every one who saw them together in that mo-

ment knew what was to happen. I knew. It seemed to me that my blood turned to ice. My vague resentment became hatred—not because I had lost everything to a man who had not raised a finger to defeat me, but because I knew that he could only make her unhappy.

He behaved so scandalously that night that he passed outside the reach of criticism. He was a law unto himself, and he had no judges. She had become his goal, his purpose, and he went for her in much the way, no doubt that he had gone after fortune and power. He danced with no one else, spoke to no one else. When another partner engaged her, he simply stood back and waited, his arms folded, his eyes following her remorselessly. He looked impatient, passionately impatient, but not anxious. It was as though already an understanding had been reached between them, and that these others were an exasperation to them both.

It was a bitter winter's night. He had his car at the door to take him the few steps to his own house across the way. He chose to dismiss it and to walk home with me across the sodden fields to my own house. For all the cutting north wind he carried his fur-lined coat over his arm, and by the drifting moonlight I caught glimpses of him—an incongruous, not unimposing, figure in the rough austere setting of night and storm, the well-cut evening clothes a masquerade.

We parted at the first gate. For the interview between us had been sharp and bitter and for me un-

endurable. His first words had been like the sword thrust of an adversary who had not even troubled to make the first warning salute.

"I have asked her to marry me," he said.

I answered passionately, "You are mad," knowing that he was not mad at all, but only absolutely sure of himself.

And he was at once tolerant and faintly amused, knowing my helplessness.

"I suppose I should have told you first, but it would have been a mere formality, and formalities bore me. You yourself are too reasonable to complain against what can't be helped. Perhaps if I hadn't come along she might have married you. I don't know. Anyhow it's done now."

"Do you mean that she accepted you?"

"No. But she will. She knows as well as I do. I have to go to America on business in two months' time. She will go with me."

I stopped short. The thing didn't seem ridiculous—only terrible. I wasn't thinking of myself now, but of her.

"Look here," I said. "You've fallen in love, and whatever you've wanted in life you've taken. You haven't cared what happened. But now you're supposed to care. Look at it from her side. You've swept her off her feet. But when all the excitement of it is over—what will be left? You haven't a thing in common. You despise what is dearest to her—she will hate what you love. You'll break her heart—and if you have any feeling—your own."

He heard me, reining in his impatience. "She loves me and she will be happy. All this"—he nodded towards the dim lights of Kings Mead "—all this junk is like a doll that a girl plays with until her own child comes. It's romantic foolishness. I shall give her the reality."

I felt myself stifling. I said thickly, "She and I belonged to each other," stupidly enough, and he glanced down at me from his superior height, and I am sure he smiled.

"Because you collect old glass and you used to read Swinburne together? I shall give her other things to think of."

"—Money," I said, "modern plumbing, newfangled telephones, and a car."

"Incidentally myself," he interrupted, laughing. "All good things in their way. At any rate it is for her to choose, isn't it? Or are you so old-fashioned that you think not?"

I let him banter me. I had lost. I knew that. But I had at least one last stand to make.

"You think me a poor creature," I said quietly. "I don't make money. I don't like the things you buy with it. But I love Christine. Perhaps that gives me more energy and courage than you expect in me. And I warn you, if she is unhappy, I shall make her come away with me—if she is ten times your wife——"

"Agreed," he said. "And I'll let her go. After all, I happen to love her, too, you know."

And he gave me his hand so frankly and so seri-

ously that my anger died. But I was at the end of my tether, and I turned and left him.

III

In six weeks they were married. It was all done very quietly and resolutely. Things happened behind the scenes which I could only suspect. I was fairly certain that the bills loading Sir Geoffrey's writing table vanished during that time. I don't say that he was bought over. After all, the decision rested with Christine. But it made things easier. A poor man would have had to wait. As to Christine, she was like a woman living in a dream. She heard me when I pleaded with her—for I did not give up without a struggle—but as she might have listened to the story of some one infinitely remote. She tried to grieve for both of us, but her own happiness was too great. I remember saying in my anguish for her:

"Have you ever thought what you will talk of together, day after day, year after year, you who haven't a word in common?"

And her answer, "I shall learn to speak his language."

At that, in a kind of miserable anger, I flung the word "infatuation" at her. At which she stood up, looking me straight and fearlessly in the eyes.

"I never loved any one before," she said.

That silenced me. I went away—right away—and when I came back she was Roger Fenwick's

wife. It was a year later, and it stands to reason that I knew nothing save what was told me or what I could piece together for myself. They had been to America, Sir Geoffrey was dead, Kings Mead had been pulled down and the new stables were in course of erection, they were adding a ballroom on to the other horrors of the Manor. The latter reared itself up out of the green hillside like a horned and crested monster, red-faced and obese. It had an air of having devoured its ancient rival and of having sunk back upon its haunches, smug with satisfaction.

And Christine was happy. That was the incredible, amazing thing—happy and frank with me as with an old comrade whom she could trust. We stood together at the window of her over-crowded, over-luxurious drawing-room and looked across the lovely park to the disease-spot of brick and scaffolding that had been her home. And she spoke of it all steadily and brightly, not even wincing.

"Roger always hated it," she said, "and when father died there was no reason any more why he shouldn't have his way. It wasn't as though it were Elizabethan or anything like that. It had no real value."

"Except that you loved it," I muttered.

She was silent for a moment. She knew what I was remembering—the gracious and mellow loveliness of those old walls, the sombre and inimitable grandeur of the great beams that had frowned down on generations of her people. There she and I had

begun the delicate, exquisite understanding of all lovely things, which had seemed to promise everything and had crumbled to nothing at the first touch. There she and I had talked and read and dreamed together. Now the place and the dreams had gone like a mist blown by a strong wind. Still we knew each other's minds too well for subterfuge. She saw the room behind her as I saw it, and suddenly she turned to me and met my unspoken question with a brave steadiness.

"You see, Keith, if one has to choose between two loves, one has to choose—that's all there is to it."

"You've given up everything," I said.

"My dear, it's very little compared to what I've won. I'm happy—I didn't know any human being could be so happy. What do a few books, a few stone walls, matter? He's new and different. He didn't understand them. But I could understand his life, and I am living it. I wanted you to know that."

"Will it always last?" I asked. "Can one human being give up his personality to another like that and not suffer? Can it be done at all?"

She smiled wisely and tenderly. "Perhaps a woman can," she answered.

At that moment he came in. He had changed—along his own lines. He seemed to have grown bigger and to exhale the very breath of success and power. He shook hands and then stood by his wife's side, his arm over her shoulder, smiling at me with a friendly challenging mockery. And it was true. They were fine to look at—each in a differ-

ent way and linked together by a frank and open passion for each other. I felt suddenly abashed and small and thankful, too. For, after all, I did love with the best I have in me.

"Well," he said, "are you going to take her away from me, Masters?" And as she turned to look up at him with a smiling interrogation he went on, bringing the hot color to my face, "You see, Masters couldn't believe I could make you happy, dear. So we made a compact that if I failed I was to give you up to him. Shall I?"

For a moment her eyes flashed on me with a proud resentment, and then, remembering, softened and grew kind. Then, worst of all, they both laughed. And I laughed, too, turning the whole thing into a joke. Indeed I seemed to myself absurd enough in the face of that invulnerable happiness.

After that things settled down. I went back to my glass and my old life. I became a frequent visitor to their house and played the part of an old lover become friend, not unsuccessfully, I fancy. But almost unknown to myself I was watching. I didn't, I couldn't, believe in the ultimate success of such an experiment. And yet all the signs of an absolute success were there. One might have said that Fenwick had made her over again in his own image, moulding her mind and soul to his fancy. She who had never cared for sport and had been a timid rider hunted with him. She wore the valuable, rather commonplace jewelry with which he loaded her with a proud head. She moved about that vast,

congested, too shiny house, with its retinue of expressionless servants, as though its ugly comfort and shallow magnificence were the very expression of herself. I doubted if she ever opened a book in those days. Her conversation was of the things that interested him—finance, politics, horses, cars, his friends. She had indeed put away her toys, as he had said she would, and taken to the real things of life. Or, as I saw it, she had let him swallow her up, immolating herself as a willing, loving sacrifice.

Well, she had to choose. And that they loved each other utterly was undenied even by me. I began to believe in miracles until one day I saw something that shook my faith. It was the opening run of the season. Hounds were in full cry. Christine, Fenwick, and I were riding close to one another. Usually she hung behind, but to-day he turned and called to her laughingly, and she drove her horse alongside of his, valiantly keeping pace. So that it happened that for the first time she was in at the kill and the master brought her the bleeding mask as trophy.

I saw her face. It was white as death. The fine tender mouth was set in an inflexible pitiful line. I think she was near fainting. She smiled at last and thanked him. But I knew that the old Christine was there still, driven into hiding, gagged and manacled by her love, but alive.

It was on the ride home that the disaster happened. She said afterward that she was tired and careless. At any rate her horse bolted and swept

her under some trees, one low-hanging branch of which struck her across the forehead. She kept her seat mercifully, and within a hundred yards, Fenwick, looking like death himself, had headed off the already sobered animal, bringing it to a standstill. Apparently no damage had been done. She laughed off our anxiety and appeared at the Hunt Ball that night with no sign of the accident save a certain pallor. A heavy diamond and emerald tiara—his last gift—covered the red mark where the branch had struck her. After all, it had been a trivial accident —especially in a hunting county where bad spills were part of the day's work.

IV

Two days later they went up to town and were gone some weeks. No one knew the reason of their sudden departure, but his huge and wide-spread enterprises were explanation enough. I was hardened by this time to doing without so much as a sight of her, but for some reason or other a vague disquiet possessed me. I was unable to settle down either to my work or my hobby. My unrest drove me out of doors; a bitter winter's wind laden with snow drove me back to my mournful and empty home. At nightfall I heard the familiar purr of Fenwick's car as it slid past on its way to the station. I heard its return, the long clarion note of its horn as it swung into the gateway. I ought to have been at peace then. For she had come home. But instead my un-

reasoned anxiety suddenly reached a head. To my excited fancy there had been at once something tragic and sinister about that silent departure and that unheralded return. I had to see them. I felt that just to see the lights of their room shining would bring me reassurance.

I stole out. It says something for my strange state that I never noticed the cold or the intense dark which at another time might have made it hard to find my way along the slippery footpath across the fields. A single lighted window guided me, and within sight of the manor's ponderous assured shadow I came to a halt. My own conduct suddenly appeared ridiculous and unwarranted. How should I explain my appearance on such a night—or my fear, an absurd fear in the face of their invulnerable security? Then, just as I was about to turn away, I saw that Fenwick was standing at the long open window opposite staring out as though he had seen me and were waiting. I came out into the light then. But he had not seen me at all. I could tell that, although he made no sign. His usually fresh-colored face was absolutely colorless and blank. I think if the devil himself had risen up at his feet it wouldn't have moved him.

"You'll think me a perfect ass, Fenwick," I said. "I heard your car pass, and I got a ridiculous notion that something was wrong. I didn't mean to disturb you."

He motioned me to come in, then closed the window. He said very quietly:

"Something is wrong."

"What—not Christine."

He nodded. He would not look at me.

"You remember that ride? The blow across the head? It seemed nothing. But afterward—we went up to town—the specialists, you know—not one—all of them—chasing from one to the other—you don't know what it's been like—the waiting—the hope. It's her eyes, Masters—her sight."

He stood there, clasping and unclasping his hands, in a nervous, unconscious anguish. If the many he had trampled under foot in his inexorable course had seen him then, they might have wondered and even pitied him.

"Go on, for Heaven's sake!"

"It's—something to do with the retina—a loosening—incurable——"

"Not—not blind?"

He did not answer. I felt a sudden sickness, almost physical, shake me so that I could hardly stand. Christine—my blue-eyed, shining Christine—who had loved the loveliness of the world so much, who had turned away from it all for love—now dark, utterly dark forever. It was like a cruel, ironic stroke of fate, an abominable perverse justice. It was as though the power that had given her sight and understanding had been outraged at her sacrifice of the gift.

It was a morbid, horrible reflection. I looked at Fenwick. To my utter amazement I saw that his

face was wet. He made no attempt to hide his tears. He was too big to be ashamed.

"I'm crying for both of us," he said. "She doesn't cry at all. You're our friend, and I know you love her. Won't you see her?"

I didn't want to go—not then, not with him—not with all my tenderness and love and pity manacled and helpless. Yet I had no choice. I followed down the palatial corridor to her own room. I had never been there before. But with one glance it revealed everything to me. This was her last stronghold, the secret treasure house. It was from here she had gathered strength to live his life—from these remembered books, these pictures, this subdued and gracious beauty. When the hunger had become too great, too dangerous, she had come here and lost herself a little. No one had ever known or guessed. She might have gone on to her death. But now——

She sat by the bright fire. She had taken off her travelling hat, and the glow kindled the red-gold hair. She looked so young—she sat so upright with her hands folded gently in her lap—one couldn't believe.

"Christine—it's Keith."

She turned her head in my direction, smiling. The eyes were unchanged—only they missed mine by a hair's breadth. I stumbled toward her, half blinded too, and put her hand to my mouth.

She murmured: "You mustn't mind so much, you

two. After all, I might have been killed. You ought to be thankful."

We both loved her differently, but with all ourselves. And the knowledge of our common anguish broke down our disguise of self-control. To other men he might show an unbroken front—I didn't count.

For suddenly he threw himself on his knees beside her, holding her to him as though some invisible force were trying to tear her away.

"Christine—we have each other."

She laid her slender hand on his brown head. She echoed, "Yes, my darling, we have each other," caressing, soothing him as though he had been a frightened child clamouring to her in the dark where she was to live.

She had forgotten me. She was not accustomed yet to the knowledge that though others were hidden from her, she was still visible to them.

So she forgot to mask her face. And in that moment I saw how terribly afraid she was.

## V

I stayed away until he came for me. It was hard to believe that a few days like that could have shaken this man so profoundly that he looked years older. And it wasn't only the tragedy that had overtaken Christine. It was something else.

"Masters, be a good fellow and come round," he said. "Of course, I know you wanted to leave us to

ourselves and all that—but—but the days are long for her now. You might read to her a bit. She says you used to. I've tried—but—well, you know, it's not my line. I made a hash of it."

Our eyes met involuntarily and as quickly slid away from each other. Neither of us dared to think out our own thought.

But I went over as he had asked. I sat with her in that significant little room and took down the old books from the shelves. It seemed to me, as I read, that the two years of her married life had been wiped out and that if I lifted my eyes I should see her smiling on me with that remembered tenderness. But she was not thinking of me. Her face was toward the softly opened door. Her husband stood there. He came in and sat beside her, holding her hand, his jaw set as though he were fighting some one.

"You go on, Masters."

It was something from Swinburne, I remember. All the time I was reading I was aware of Fenwick's presence. It was like a spirit of unrest and violence in the room. As far as I knew he scarcely moved, and yet I felt the whole man quivering with impatience. And suddenly, almost violently, he stood up.

"Well," he said, "I don't understand all that. Sounds gibberish to me. When you've done I've got something to show you, Christine"—he flushed scarlet at that pitiful blunder—"I mean something to give you. Bring her with you, won't you?"

But after he had gone I did not read any more.

A painful awkwardness divided us. We knew too much of each other's thoughts. I looked at her pale, composed young face, thankful almost that she could not see mine, and remembered my own question, "What will you two talk of, year after year?"

She made a little vague gesture. "Thank you, Keith. Not any more now. I'd like to see"—she smiled unaffectedly—"I mean, feel what he's brought for me. You know, he brings me something every day. It helps him to bear it, my poor darling."

So I gave her my arm, and we went down together to the front entrance of the house where Fenwick waited for us. And outside stood a new car, a monstrous, marvellous thing, each detail thought out to its most extravagant possibilities, its glitter demanding an endless labor.

"It's to be your very own, Christine."

He must have hoped for something—I don't know what. What could he have hoped? He watched her run her hand over the luxurious upholstery and finger the hundred and one little contrivances for her comfort. And gradually all the fire died out of his handsome face. He looked like a child who has discovered that his favorite fairy-story is just another make-believe.

"What's this for, Roger?"

"Why, dear, don't you see?"

The whole thing was indescribably pitiful. She tried so hard. She made him drive her round the park, and praised the smooth-running engine and the perfect springing. But after all he was no fool. At

the end he turned a face to me that had a queer look of panic.

"Come again, won't you, Masters—and—and read to her?"

"Do you really want me to?" I asked and met his eyes deliberately.

"Yes, I want you to," he answered steadily.

I knew that he was thinking of that night when I had warned him. Then he had laughed. I had seemed a puny and insignificant force. He did not laugh now. The fight was on. She was his possession, and now in some inexplicably dangerous way I challenged him. I could almost see him gathering together every reserve faculty to meet and defeat me.

"Come every day you can, Masters," he said. "You see, I can't be with her always."

And so that strange year began. I can say this truthfully, that I had only one object. And I was not thinking of myself. But once I was certain that her happiness lay in my hands, I meant to stop at nothing. Neither reputation nor conventional notions of honour would have held me back. She had lost too much. She was too utterly alone.

As to Roger Fenwick, he fought me step by step. It must have been a terrible struggle—for after all, I did nothing—I had to make no effort. What I had to give her was the old unshaken understanding, an intimacy of the mind and spirit that had been ours from the beginning. I walked and read and talked and was silent with her. That was all.

He loaded her with gifts. It became a kind of obsession with him. He gave her jewels she could not see, luxuries that were like dead-sea fruit to her. He laid the whole material world—the only world he knew—at her feet, certain that therein lay her only possible consolation. He carried her away on headlong journeys across the country, wilfully oblivious to the truth that one place was dark as another to her. Sometimes she would ask him, "Tell me what you see, Roger," and he could only stammer colorless words.

And she would come back white with exhaustion and hide herself in her little room, and I would read her back to tranquillity.

I don't know what went on between those two. I could only guess. Toward the end he tried courageously enough to meet me on my own ground. He would come in and sit with us and talk of the things that had once seemed to absorb her. I remember one night in particular, for it marked a sort of crisis. He had been telling her of some big financial deal that he was trying to pull, and suddenly he looked up and saw her face.

"You're not listening, Christine," he said. "You don't care."

We saw her pitiful start, the gallant effort of her spirit. She put out her hand toward him.

"My dear, of course I'm listening. If it concerns you, it concerns me."

But he shook her off. And then he asked a strange thing. "Where are you, Christine?"

I suppose she was utterly worn out, past feigning and almost past caring. Both of them had forgotten that they were not alone.

"My darling, I've had to go back into myself. I can't help it—it's all dark everywhere else—forgive me——"

She was crying. But he did not come near her.

"I give you everything," he said, "and I only torture you."

And he went out without another word.

She poured out her heart to me then—not to me, but just to a faceless, invisible presence that was almost a part of herself. She loved him—that was the unalterable tragic fact. For love of him she had made his world her world, his gods her gods. And had her life gone on unbroken, she might have continued to worship obediently by his side at their altars. But fate—the power that had made her what she was—turned on her to punish her.

"Perhaps there are things one mustn't do—even for love, Keith."

I held my hand for that night. And the next day they were gone. It was a flight. I knew that much, and but for the thought of her weariness and despair, I might have gathered consolation from the knowledge. "Italy," the butler told me. And that again had a bitter tang. For Italy had been the land of her girl's dreams when there had been no money for such things—and after marriage—well, what did one go to Italy for anyway? A lot of old musty ruins—an historical dust-heap. I could almost hear

Fenwick's voice and his good-humoured laugh. His egotism had ridden over her like a great smooth-rolling wave. And now, when it was too late, his no less egotistical fear would drag her from place to place on a tragic hopeless pilgrimage.

They were back within a month. I had no warning. Simply at nightfall, as I sat brooding over a book, Roger Fenwick stood at my open window. He was so much a part of my thoughts that for a moment I did not believe in his reality. He might have been his own ghost. Yes, that is the impression he made on me—of something not quite earthly, of a man stripped of his body. It was just a moment's fancy, of course, but even when he spoke and moved, a little of that feeling remained. It was partly, no doubt, the fact that he looked extraordinarily ill—almost broken. The muscular heavy shoulders were rounded as though under an intolerable burden. The mere strength of his face had been fined down to a sort of austerity.

There were no preliminaries between us. I don't think we even shook hands. He came and stood opposite, leaning on the mantelshelf.

"I give up, Masters." I'm sure he had never said that to any man before and that it cost him terribly. "I give up," he repeated. Then he went on with a dogged resolution, "You remember that compact of ours? I made it in jest, I was so sure of myself. Well, you were right. She might love me—but I can't make her happy now. I've seen the whole thing. I've given her everything I have to give, and

she's dying for something I haven't got. It's killing me, too. Not that that matters. I sit opposite her, and I don't know what to say. She used to follow me—and now she can't any more. And I can't follow her. I don't know where she's gone. But you know."

"I warned you," I said, and was ashamed. It was like hitting a man who could not even defend himself.

"I know," he said. "I love her. But that's all. It's not enough. It's got to be something more than that. I haven't got it. So she's going free."

I waited. After a moment he began to tell me his plans. He was very composed and matter-of-fact. But my eyes were sharpened, and he looked to me like a man bleeding to death. He was going away—right away. He would give her a formal cause for divorce. He left it to me to see it through for her.

"Then marry her," he said. "She's your mate. I only love her."

"As she loves you," I had strength enough to answer.

"That's what's breaking her heart," he said. "She loves me—and I'm nothing to her. Masters, when we were standing in that old Roman forum, she turned and asked, 'What is it like, Roger?' and I couldn't tell her. I said, 'It looks like a heap of old bricks, dear.' And she laughed. But I saw she was near crying. She had asked for bread, and I gave her a stone. We had the most expensive suite

at the Quirinal, Masters. I would have bought up the whole place for her. But that wasn't what she wanted."

"We've got to make life bearable for her," I said.

"I know," he answered. "And I can't."

We talked for a long time after that. He was pitifully practical. He put my protests on one side. She was to be free.

"I give up," he repeated. "You've got to carry on."

When at last he left me, he held my hand for a long minute.

"I'm almost happy," he said. "I've done the right thing at last. I've made up to her. She'll think I never really cared at all. But you'll know."

"Wait," I implored him. "For God's sake, wait."

"I can't," he said. "I haven't got the strength. Go in and win."

He nodded to me with a last effort at self-control, stepped out of my window, and was gone like a flash into the dark. It made me think of a boy flying to hide the shame of his grief, and suddenly all my own hopes fell withered and dead. For they loved each other. How then should I ever make her happy? And I ran after him, calling him, stammering:

"It can't be done, Fenwick; it's too late."

But he had vanished utterly.

VI

Afterward he told me what happened to him that night. Outwardly it was nothing. It was one of those strange adventures of the spirit which are more dramatic, more significant for good or evil, than any visible event. He says that after he left me a marvellous sense of peace came over him. He had made the first sacrifice of his life. He had given up happiness. That obstinate and steadfast quality in him made his loss final and incurable. He had never loved a woman before, and his love, ruthless and egotistical as it was, had been given absolutely. He looked forward into a black empty avenue of years, his life stripped of everything that had made it worth living. He went out of my house a beggar. That was the first step of revelation.

He says that for a long time he didn't know what was happening to him. All he could think of was that she would be free and that at last he had given her peace. He knew that he was suffering. He was like a prince, clothed in silks and furs and rich ornaments, who had torn off all the splendid regalia and luxury which shielded him and walked naked in the bitter spring wind. He says he felt naked—stripped of everything—and that the pain was so keen and sharp that it was a sort of ecstasy. He had done with a burden; he had thrown off something that had stifled him. He was breathing freely for the first time.

And then, when he came out on to high ground

and looked down upon his house lying like a great sleeping monster in the folds of the hills, he remembered. Everything was his. He was one of the richest men in the world. There was nothing that human reason could desire that could not be his. He had power, he had health. He was young still. Everything.

He looked across to where Christine's home had stood and where an ornate and gaudy building now gleamed blankly in the moonlight. That old tumble-down place! Not even Elizabethan—of no possible value. Just an old homestead where people had lived, and which had been steeped in years and some grave wisdom of its own. He had been right about it, of course—from his point of view, so absolutely right. Only now something had changed. It was as though unconsciously he had shifted his ground and was seeing something that he had never seen before—something that Christine had seen even in her blindness.

And suddenly he found himself saying aloud: "What is it? What is it you love? What is it you know, Christine? Shall I never learn?"

He went into the house. Its meaningless magnificence made him feel an outcast. He went to his wife's little room and closed the door and drew the curtains across the moonlit window, like a thief opening a chest of treasures. One has to realise that he was a very strong and proud man utterly broken and humbled. He does not know how long

he spent in that place. He says it was a sort of terrible, wonderful journey. He was trying to find his way to her at last. He took up the things she loved—some of them little personal trifles which made his heart ache. He held them as though they had been talismans by which he could open the door into her secret life. He says he believes he prayed to them like a heathen. He was beside himself—outside himself, as the French say, a naked shivering spirit.

He found a book that I had been reading to her the night before they left on that last desperate flight. It was a volume of Rossetti's poems. His eye chanced on that sonnet which seems the final expression of love's dread and tenderness. Why, he had heard me read it to her. And it meant nothing.

But now he had lost her.

"Oh, love, my love, if I no more should see
thyself
Nor on the earth the shadow of thee,
Nor image of thine eyes in any spring,
How then should sound upon life's darkened
slope
The ground whirl of the perished leaves of hope,
The wind of death's imperishable wing?"

That got him, tore him to pieces. Fundamentally he was very primitive and simple. He cried openly. And then he went out and up the stairs to his wife's

bedroom. The door was never closed against him, and he stumbled in and kneeled beside her, and hid his wet face against her breast.

"Christine, I'm blind," he said. "My dear, teach me to see."

Perhaps she had been waking, too, and crying. At least, somehow she understood and gathered him close to her as though he had been a frightened child that had blundered its way safely to her through the dark.

That's forty years ago. They've suffered a good deal in those years. But they have weathered through. They have something between them which endures.

People watched them as they came into the lounge last night. It wasn't their obvious wealth—the humble deference of the servants. It wasn't the fact that even in their old age they make a very lovely couple. It was his tenderness of her, and the way she clung to him, letting him guide her. They seemed so much a part of each other.

And to-day in the cathedral I watched them from the shadow of a side chapel. I saw her run her white hand over the old slender Gothic columns and heard her ask him:

"Tell me what you see, Roger?"

And he told her, standing there hat in hand, earnest and a little anxious. For he is no poet. He sees as through a glass darkly. But at least he sees. He is like some simple pilgrim, blundering and almost inarticulate, but at least he is on the road.

"The west window is like a great jeweled wheel, Christine. The light on that column is quite red."

She smiled. "I can almost feel it on my hand."

To-morrow they are going to the *Bois des Eschelles,* and there amid the army of white crosses he will pick out one for her to touch. And she will see the flowers that are growing there with his eyes, and he will see them with her spirit.

And so they will be together.

## III

## *The Wonderful Story*

YES! No doubt it does seem strange to you that I should be contented here. Such a little bit of a place. Nothing ever happens. The people are very ordinary people. They sit under me on Sunday, and if they keep awake they feel, I think, that they have offered God an honest and sufficient sacrifice. No one to rub wits with—no one to sit with me by a roaring study fire and quarrel with me over a translation. Just sometimes a stray visitor like yourself. And then, of course, I grew garrulous.

Well, I am growing old, too.

When I say that nothing happens, I mean nothing that does not happen everywhere in the world at some time or other. People die and people are born. They quarrel and make it up. There is trouble and sickness, sometimes for the individual and sometimes for the whole community. It is spring now, and the countryside is green and peaceful. But the winters are very hard. You see, that gap in the hills lets in a tearing north wind, and sometimes for weeks together the snow lies so thick on the ground that some of the outlying farms are completely cut off. And the people are poor. They have nothing to fall back upon, and there is much

suffering. But all this is very commonplace. You will find it anywhere.

When I first took over the incumbency I was very unhappy. After such an adventurous, roving life as mine, it seemed the end of everything. A straggling hamlet for a man who was as familiar with Rome as with New York, and who reads the classics in the original with the same ease as he reads his native Dickens! A handful of dull, illiterate yokels for a scholar who had mixed with the best brains in Europe. Dear Heaven, what a fate!

But I have grown content. I have learnt a great deal here. Indeed, I am not sure that I have not learnt more in this quiet, inarticulate little place than in all the rest of the world. Or rather, it is so quiet that I have come to notice things that I overlooked elsewhere in the noise and bustle.

I said "very ordinary people." But are not the most ordinary of us extraordinary and wonderful enough?

Shall I tell you about the Martins? I am almost afraid to tell you their little story, because after all, like every other event here, nothing really happens in it. It is such a slight yet exquisite thing. I have told it to the wrong people, and they have simply stared at me, wondering when the point was coming. So I have grown cautious. But I wish I had de Maupassant here to help me.

The Martins were two brothers—Robert and Jimmy Martin—and Kate Richards was their nearest neighbour. That, at any rate, is the promising

and hackneyed beginning. They lived in a three-roomed cottage just outside the village, and besides working their little bit of land, they did odd jobs for the gentry in the district. If a roof wanted mending, or a pipe leaked, or an extra hand was needed in the garden, there were always the Martins to call upon. One or other of them would be found able and willing. Between them they made enough to live on, and that is all that people hope for in these parts.

They were brothers and nearly of an age, but there was not more than a family resemblance between them. Perhaps I can best describe Robert by saying that no one except his brother called him "Bob," and that only on rare occasions. Not that he was forbidding or unfriendly. But one would as soon have taken liberties with a good-natured bull.

I can remember quite well the first time I saw him. It was in church, and I was preaching my introductory sermon. Suddenly, for no apparent reason, I began to feel disturbed—as though something had come near me which touched and animated, not the bad side of my man's nature, but the lower side. I had been speaking of the spirit, and I began to feel of the earth earthy. I looked down from the pulpit, and there was Robert Martin, a little to my right, his eyes fixed on my face. He was not handsome, but very big and powerful, and dark; high cheek-boned and black-browed. His eyes were a curious slow burning hazel. I do not think he understood a word of what I was saying, any more than the rest

of the congregation—I had not yet learnt to adapt myself—and no one noticed that I broke off with the threads of my theme all dangling in disorder. That was the effect he had on me. I know he had the same effect on others—especially on women. No one could be near him without feeling troubled. I do not mean that he was bad or brutal, or even coarse. There was not a more austere living man in the whole village. But he was elemental. I do not think in all my dealings with human beings—some of them the most violent and uncivilised—I have ever come across any one who had his roots so deep in the earth, or who came so near to the animals in the directness and simplicity of his emotions. His very austerity was animal. You know the animals are neither so promiscuous nor so bestial as we choose to think them. They have their austerity—unconscious and effortless. They await their mate.

Robert Martin was like that. And because our people here, though they are very simple and ignorant, have been touched by that process of detaching the soul from the body which we call civilisation, he troubled them.

James Martin was different. He was just Jimmy. I do not think he felt less. Perhaps in his way he was the more sensitive of the two, but his feelings were confused with a whole lot of abstract notions about right and wrong and God, so that they were less direct and less effective. He was not clever, but in his slow, groping way he was intent on being "fair" and on doing the fair thing by everybody.

He had a fund of good spirits too, and could joke and laugh in a way the elder brother never did. People liked him, but you could be a long time in a place before you knew he was there.

So much for the two men. Then there was Kate Richards. Hers was the next cottage to the Martins', though half a mile divided them: a single-roomed, miserable place where she lived with a bed-ridden grandmother in grim hand-to-mouth poverty. Kate worked for the neighbouring farmers' wives whenever the stress was great; but they were poor themselves, and could give her little.

On the whole, the country, contrary to popular belief, does not breed pretty women. The work is too hard, the housing conditions too wretched. Women wither and grow weather-beaten almost before they reach womanhood. Kate Richards was not beautiful. But even in her teens she had a bigness of build, a kind of slow, gracious strength that gave one a sense of security and peace. There was something generous about the masses of fair hair which she wore neatly plaited about her head, and the steady, full-gazing eyes. Of the earth too, if you like, but of the earth in its deep serenity, in its mood of placid brooding. She knew nothing of its volcanic unrest.

When I first came she was a girl, but a few months later her grandmother died, and suddenly she became a woman, and then Robert Martin turned to her instinctively, as a child turns to the sun.

I have never seen a more simple courtship. There was no shy hesitancy, no self-distrustful advances. Robert Martin followed her, not like a dog, but like a man driven by an instinct which there was no gainsaying. I saw him often enough in the congregation, with his burning eyes on her face. It was impossible to forget him. He was dynamic, a slow unreasoning force moving to its appointed end.

As to Kate herself—I do not know. You see, I got to read and understand the two men, inarticulate as they were; but women, though they talk easily of their superficial emotions, have reserves which no one penetrates. For myself, I think she loved Martin as simply and naturally as he loved her. He was the first man who had come into her life, and she accepted him passively and with a kind of grateful awe.

He must have made a magnificent lover. I remember coming upon the two of them one brilliant summer night in Honeysuckle Lane behind the church. I knew them at once because of his unusual height. His arms were about her, and I gave the discreet cough which I have learnt in these parts; but though she struggled a little he would not let her go. There was no sheepish edging apart and giggling. With his arm about her shoulders he turned towards me, his head up, his face in the pale light as proud as Lucifer's. And yet not bad either —not ignoble. Lucifer was not the right name. I was thinking of some wild animal I have seen—a

mountain lion that I tracked once and which turned on me. . . .

I had come upon them smiling in the fatuous, superior way of old people, but I passed them feeling ashamed. I felt myself a mean little man with scanty hair, and bowed shoulders, and thin blood in my veins. I could not even answer his serene "Good night, sir."

Two days later the village knew that they were betrothed.

I am sure in my own mind that Jimmy had never thought of her. He was too young. He was one of those men who mature late, and who, indeed, remain undeveloped all their lives unless some big event comes to them. He had light-hearted flirtations with half the girls in the village, but they meant nothing. He seemed at that time as incapable of a serious emotion as he was incapable of a mean act. He was just Jimmy—good-natured, contented, and hard-working, with a muddle-headed belief in God and the general rightness of ordained things.

Two days after the betrothal Martin came to me to arrange about the wedding. He did not wear his holiday clothes, as other villagers would have done on such an occasion. His black hair was matted with the day's heat, and the strong scent of the fields was about his body. But I knew somehow that he meant neither myself nor the occasion any disrespect. When I close my eyes I can see him now, standing in front of me, with his queer look of almost sombre abstraction. He was like a man held

in some sort of trance, and though, judging him coldly, he was just a slow, ignorant rustic, yet the single simplicity of his nature gave him the dignity of thought.

"Well, this is quick work, Martin," I said.

"There be no cause for us to wait, sir," he answered. "We knows what we wants, and what don't come to us now bain't never coming."

There was truth in this. These people have youth in common with the rest of the world. They have no other inheritance.

"And where's the home to be?" I asked, making my notes.

"We stays where we are, sir."

"And Jimmy?"

"Well, sir, we've got three rooms. So be it we'll manage for a while——"

I chanced to look up, and there was his dark face flushed with an emotion which both startled and touched me deeply. It was as though for a moment I saw the whole man and his one purpose and his one hope. It was all that life offered him, and he held to it with all his strength. I remember that I looked away from him quickly, as though unwillingly I had been prying.

"It's not easy to build a home these days," I said.

"I'll manage, sir," he answered quietly.

You see, he was very strong. It is difficult for strong men to realise failure.

When it was all fixed up we shook hands together. I felt warmly towards him, and my "Well, bless you

both!" was no clerical phrase. But I do not think he heard me. Now that my part was played I had passed out of his vision.

Yes, and there was something primeval in the way he set out to prepare his place for her. That, too, was like an all-mastering instinct. Late into the night a light burnt in the cottage window, and after every one else had gone to bed, one could hear hammering and the buzz of a saw. He was a good workman, and in a short time he had added two new chairs to their little stock of furniture, and a dresser and a window-box, and all the shelves and drawers were in first-class repair. He allowed no one to help him—not even Jimmy. He did not like people to watch him or to ask questions, and when they did so he grew shy and sullen. That also seemed to me oddly typical. But Kate came sometimes towards evening, and when I passed I would see her leaning against the lintel, her quiet eyes following the swift, strong work of his hands. I never heard them talk together. Either they fell silent when people came near them, or they never spoke. They did, indeed, seem like people wrapped in a kind of dream.

Robert Martin liked me. I was the only outsider who knew what he was doing and heard progress. The day before his wedding I came upon him perched on the roof of their cottage tinkering with a loose tile.

"Making the ship weather-tight?" I called to him.

"That's right, sir! All finished now." And he made an awkward flourish and lost his balance and

came down like a helpless log. It was not far to fall, but he was a big man and fell awkwardly.

I went to him, and Jimmy came running from their bit of land where he had been working, and between us we carried him into the little living-room. He kept on remonstrating with us angrily, saying it was nothing—nothing at all, and that in a minute he'd be up and about again. But I noticed that when we laid him on the old horse-hair couch he did not try to move and though he seemed in no particular pain, I had my misgivings even then.

We sent for Kate and for the doctor. I had a sermon to preach that evening in a neighbouring parish and I could not wait. But before I left Kate came down the narrow garden path. She brushed past me as though she did not see me.

I could not get those three out of my mind, and the next morning I went round early to the Martins' cottage. Jimmy must have been waiting for me. He came down the garden path and stopped me before I had opened the gate. He was trembling all over like a big frightened child.

"Don't you go in, sir," he whispered. "Not yet awhile. The doctor's been again. Robert's main bad—it's his back, sir. A bone or summit—I don't rightly know what. But he'll not work again——"

My heart was leaden for them all. But, somehow, I'd known all along.

"Does he know?" I asked.

"No one's told him. We daresn't. He keeps on

trying to get up and talkin' of the weddin'—he's like something mad——"

"And Kate?" I said.

"I was going to 'er now, sir. I waited a bit, hoping you'd come with me. It's an awful thing——"

I went with him. I shall never forget that half-mile across the sunny fields. I took Jimmy's arm at last because he was stumbling, and I thought he would break down utterly. The blow had caught him in the full tide of his careless youth, and he crumbled under it.

"We must think of Kate," I said. "It's worse for her. We've got to help her."

He straightened up.

"That's true, sir. We've got to help her."

It's queer what premonitions real disaster sends out as harbingers. To all appearances there had been nothing much to be alarmed about. It was the kind of accident that at the worst might have involved a broken arm or leg. But when Kate saw us coming she went back into her cottage and stood bracing herself against the table, facing us as though we had been enemies. I confess I failed. So it was Jimmy who went up to her and answered the questions she could hardly utter.

"No, it's not that bad, my girl. But it's bad enough. If it's as the doctor says, poor Bob won't walk no more in this life."

Remember, it was her wedding day. The simple dress which she had toiled over for the last month lay on the chair—and the cheap wreath of orange

blossoms that had cost her many a sacrifice. For a minute no one moved or spoke. Then Jimmy, who could bear no more, took her hand, and she turned to him and buried her face on his shoulder, crying her heart out. And he comforted her. I forget what he said. It was disjointed and uncouth enough. But I wish I had so much of the beauty of pure human kindness in my sophisticated old heart. I think in that moment he grew up and became a man. And I think, also, for the first time, he saw Kate with a man's eyes.

I went on ahead. There could be no wedding, and Robert must be told—if not the whole truth, at least enough to make the present case clear to him. And Jimmy had done his share. They were both genuinely afraid of Robert, helpless as he was, and I own that I was afraid, too. You see, there was that immense force in him. How would it vent itself?

They had made up a bed for him in the living-room, and the first thing I saw was his dark face glaring at me over the white sheet. I have never seen anything more terrible. He was like a wild beast, trapped and bound and helpless.

"Where have you all been?" he shouted at me. "What's up? Why don't you come and lend a hand to get me out o' this? What's wrong? Don't you know I'm going to get married? What's that damn fool of a doctor done to me? Where's Kate?"

The veins on his forehead stood out, and the sweat dripped down his livid cheeks. I could see

that he was trying to break the hideous, incomprehensible spell that held him. I began the weary platitudes which the well and strong offer the sick.

"It's a bad business, Martin," I said. "You've got to show patience and courage. You've got to pull yourself together and show us the man you are. There can be no marriage for you to-day——"

He could use his arms a little. He thrust me on one side, and I don't blame him, for I felt my own futility bitterly. His eyes were fixed on the door, and now they were full of sheer, awful panic.

"Kate!" he called. "Kate!"

She came to him. Somehow it was all very different from what I had foreseen. She came heavily, slowly, as though she were being drawn against her will. He caught hold of her and dragged her down on her knees beside him. Then she seemed to rouse herself. She put her arm under him, and held his dark head against her breast. And he began to cry.

She was quite tearless. I saw her face. It was deadly pale, and full of horror and pity and grief. But love?—I don't know. It was the queerest and saddest thing.

As the days went on I began to understand. She was the sort of woman who would have married the man she loved so long as there was a breath of life left in him. But she did not marry Robert Martin. There was no thought of it, and I will do him the justice to say that even then the suggestion never crossed his lips. And yet she had loved him. It was the love that has driven men and women to-

gether from the beginning of things—sometimes to their happiness, and as often to their damnation, but always to the glory of the race. She had loved the man. He had swept her off her feet by his strength, his immense virility, his superb animalism. But now he was not that man any more. It was not her fault. I know she reproached herself, and agonised over her own wickedness. I saw her grow pale and hollow-eyed with the effort to overcome herself. But it was of no use. The attributes which she had worshipped in Robert Martin were paralysed, and her love for him was dead.

Men and women fall by the wayside, but life goes on. Jimmy went back to work and toiled for both of them. Kate hid away the unused wedding-dress and the poor little wreath. Every day she went out to one or other of the farms and sometimes they paid her with a shilling and sometimes with a little produce. They were sorry for her, but it was a bad year for them. In the evening she came down to the Martins' cottage, and she and Jimmy would sit with Robert and try to cheer and amuse him. But what could they do? What had they to offer? Their own doings and their clumsy village gossip enraged him. And there was nothing else. Mostly they fell into a helpless, baffled silence.

He was too big to be carried up and down stairs, so his bed was made up permanently in the living-room and set where he could see the garden and the passers-by through the open door. In the early morning, before he went to his work, Jimmy set his

brother right for the day, and often a neighbour would drop in—a pure act of charity, for Robert knew no gratitude—and I helped when I could. Once I came in the evening, and there the three of them were in the grey dusk, not looking at each other, not speaking, and Robert Martin with his face turned to the wall and the savage tears rolling down his cheeks. Somehow the picture stays in my mind.

I could do nothing, though Heaven knows I tried. It was my duty; but besides that it irked me as a human being to see a man rot under my eyes. I brought him the papers. I tried to interest him in the world's affairs. I read to him the kind of stories that I thought might appeal to him. But the strong cannot choose for the weak. Unconsciously we grow to look upon the sick as people of another world. We forget. And one day in my reading I came upon a simple love scene, and Martin tore the book from me and crushed it between his hands till it was a shapeless mass.

"Do you think I'm dead yet?" he panted. "Don't I want things like them—a home and wife and children? Do you think because I'm tied down here I'm not a man no more——"

And he went on and on, raving, and I sat there feeling as though inadvertently I had opened the gate of a little hell. For it was true. He was not different. His body had been injured, but its passions and desires remained. They festered. Imprisoned and thrown back upon themselves, they lost

their elemental simplicity and became evil. They seemed to be eating alive the man they lived in.

He began to hate his brother. I don't think that Jimmy realised the change as hatred—not at first, at any rate. He only knew that Robert liked to be alone with Kate in the evening, to lie there and hold her hand, and stare at her pale, sad face with his burning eyes, and so Jimmy would go out into the garden and work till it was too dark to see. And then he would lean against the garden gate and wait for her. At first they just exchanged "good nights," or she would linger for a minute and they would talk in an undertone together as though some dark, tyrannical force were watching them; but after a while he began to walk home with her. I don't know what they said to one another in those few quiet moments of their lives. Probably very little. As I told you, they were just ordinary people. They were rather like the soil they lived on—heavy and silent—and like cattle which find their way by instinct to the water and rich pasture, and which suffer without complaint. The tragedy had isolated them from the ordinary village life. Jimmy bore a double burden, and when his work was done there was the gloomy home to face and the endless care of Robert. And Kate's life was hard, too. She was all alone, and for some reason or other the young men fought shy of her as though they felt there was no hope for them.

So I can imagine that their quiet walks through the darkness were a great comfort to these two.

They must have grown to look forward to them—and from thence to loving one another. And all the while there was Robert in the background like an accursed spirit.

So three years passed like that. And I believe that Jimmy told me the truth when he said that in all that time they never kissed each other or held each other's hands or spoke of what was growing up between them. Because Jimmy loved his brother, and Kate could not love him any more, they were both laden with remorse and guilt. But it was not till afterwards that I knew what had been happening. All I saw was that the youth seemed to be fading out of them like a starved fire. And in a blind, unreasoning, and most un-Christian way, I grew to hate Robert with his hideous desire of life.

Then came a wonderful summer. We English are a hard and stoic people. Our climate, like a stern monitor, stands at our backs, bracing us to meet bitter winds and leaden, dripping skies with an untroubled courage. But when such a summer comes, it is like the lifting of a burden. Every day is an intoxicating wonder. We look out at the world with new eyes. We feel that nothing is beyond us, and all our deep reserves of courage are freed for the sheer joy of life.

It was like that with us then. In the gentle rains and long, mellow days of sunshine everything flourished. The crops ripened unchecked. The sheep and cattle multiplied. A blessing seemed on the land. The old wiseacres shook their heads, threat-

ening disaster, but none came. We rode into a golden harvest-time.

Yes, it was like an intoxication. I felt it. One saw it on the faces of the people—a kind of glow—of subdued laughter. There was riot in the blood of the oldest of us. Lovers were like blackberries in Honeysuckle Lane, and I grew rich on marriage fees. It was as though all creation expanded and blossomed out. The drear winters and bite of poverty slipped away into a dim past.

Only Martin rotted in his misery. I forgot my repugnance for him in those days. He had not changed. He was not broken. He lay there scowling out into the sunshine. The passing of the strong young men and the laughter of their sweethearts as they strolled together in the cool dusk was torture to him. Sometimes I marvelled that the will in him did not perform a miracle and bring him to his feet.

So the harvest came. It was a real festival, such as one reads of in the old, simple days. Every one who could stand was in the fields. God had done His share, and we were going to do ours with a will. At lunch-time we sat together under the sheaves, like seeking out like, and it amused me to pick out from the little groups those whom I should be called upon to marry next. It was then that it began to dawn upon me how it was with Kate and Jimmy Martin. It was not only that they were always together. It was the change in them. Somehow in that general well-being and prosperity they had regained their youth. They were like flowers that

had been nipped by frost, but which slowly blossom out in the day's warmth. The sun had burnt their faces and strong young arms to a golden brown. Their eyes were very bright. They laughed and talked together as they worked, not secretly, but as though they were quite alone. They gave me the feeling that the rest of us were just shadows.

When the last sheaves were gathered in, the biggest farmer in the neighbourhood gave his barn for a final and triumphant junketing. A fiddler and a trombone were produced from somewhere. The gentry provided a mighty spread. And I, of course, as parson, had to give my blessing and, since the Squire, was absent, to lead off. Later on, when I was free to look about me, I remembered Kate and Jimmy. They danced together. Though I was a good friend of theirs, they did not even see me when they passed me. Their faces were those of two people lost in an ecstatic happiness.

But I could only think of Robert. I could not get him out of my mind. And presently I left and made my way through the deserted village to the Martins' cottage. The door stood open. It was quite dark. I called, and heard a shuffling sound like that of a sick animal trying to drag itself from its lair.

"Shall I make a light for you, Martin?" I asked cheerfully.

"No," he said. His voice sounded choked and roughened. He groped for my hand, and his own burned with fever. "Where are they?" he flung at me. "What are they doing now?"

"Why, they're dancing," I answered in the same matter-of-fact tone. "They've worked hard. They deserve a good time. And, look here, I've been stealing for you, Martin. I remembered how you liked old Mrs. Simpson's ham pie——"

"Stop that!" he said between his teeth. "Where's Jimmy and Kate?"

"They're there, too, of course."

"Together?"

"Why, yes," I answered. "It's only natural."

"Perhaps it is," he interrupted. His grip on my hand fairly hurt me. "But she's my woman for all that, parson. And I'll put my black curse on the man who tries to take her. I don't care who he be——"

I tore myself free from him.

"You're talking wickedly, Robert Martin," I said. "Because a great misfortune has befallen you, you have no right to blast the lives of others. Kate is young. If you really love her you will hope that one day a happiness will come to her that will atone to her for her loss."

He gave a kind of laugh.

"That's enough parson's talk," he cried. "You go and tell them what I've said to you."

I went. It was useless to talk to him, and I was sick with the misery and shame of it all.

You know how sometimes it seems that things are working to a crisis, and then instead they fall back and nothing happens. It was like that. After the harvest festival we went on with the old life.

The weather broke in a grey and dismal autumn, and we crept back into ourselves and were a dour, stern people again. As far as I could see, there was no change in the relations of Kate and the two Martins. If anything, it seemed to me that Kate and Jimmy avoided one another. But I was very busy and had no time to study them, and was, perhaps, eager enough to put away a painful problem.

And then, one dripping November night, Jimmy came to see me. I had him into my study, but he refused to sit down, and stood opposite me, with the firelight on his face. And it struck me that the youth had gone out of him for good. He had the look of a man who has learnt to carry a heavy burden.

"Kate and I are to be married, sir," he said. "And I've come to ask you if you'll put up the banns for us."

It's strange how the troubles of a little community like mine get a hold on one. I was as aghast as though some personal misfortune had befallen me. For a minute I was silent. What could I say—remembering Robert? At last I stammered out:

"And when is it to be, Jimmy?"

"I don't know how quick it can be done, sir. We want it now."

I went on blunderingly:

"God knows I don't grudge you two happiness. You deserve it. And you have a right to marry each other. There's no one who can say a word against

it. I'm thinking of Robert. It would have been better if it had been any man but you, Jimmy."

"I know," he said. "But it's got to be, sir." And he looked at me steadily, but with a kind of despair. "It's no good for any one to say aught to us," he went on. "Kate and me we've wanted each other these two years and haven't so much as said a word. We stuck it as best we could. But there's a time comes when flesh and blood can't stand no more——"

And I said nothing. Looking back, I shall always be glad to think I did not add my drop to their bitter cup.

"Does Robert know?" I asked, when we had settled all the details and he had already said "Good night."

"No, sir; I'm going to tell him now," Jimmy answered quietly.

It so happened that I was called away on private business the following morning, and I never knew what transpired between the two brothers. But when I returned the first ceremony I performed was the marriage of James Martin to Kate Richards. It was very quiet, very simple. Curious, and often pitiless, as they are, the villagers kept away. It was as though they felt instinctively there was a blight over the union. And yet to me there was something very tender and beautiful about those two poor sinners. They knelt before me hand in hand like children who cling to each other for support and comfort. They were so sincere, so deeply in earnest with

their love, and they faced a future that might well have daunted the bravest hearts.

No, I can't think of any marriage that has moved me more.

Afterwards I went home with them. It wasn't my business, perhaps, but I felt they wanted me, and I couldn't fail them. When we came to the garden gate I went on ahead. The first thing I seemed to see in that low, dim room was Robert Martin's face. He did not look at me. His staring eyes were fixed beyond me. I went up to him and put my hand over his clenched fist.

"You've been an unlucky, unhappy man, Martin," I said; "but it's in your power now to give happiness to yourself and to your brother and sister——"

I believe that the whole thing was a shock to him. I believe that he thought he had put such terror into his brother's heart that he would never dare go through with the marriage. His face was convulsed with passion.

"You filthy, slimy traitors—both of you!" he screamed at them. "You've cheated and robbed me. Why didn't you go on with what you've begun? Why don't you put me out into the street—or send me to th' workhouse? Or are you trying to pluck up courage?" His eyes fell upon Kate standing beside her husband, and they distended with a look beyond description. And yet I swear there was love in it. He threw a name at her which I will not repeat. I saw Jimmy clench his hands, and involuntarily I stepped between them. "And as to you, you snivel-

ling, black-coated humbug," he shouted, "get out of here! If you show your face in this place again, by God, I'll stand up yet and break your neck for you!"

He lay there helpless and threatened us. He had the whip-hand from the beginning.

Well, I am quick tempered, and there are limits to my endurance even with a sick man. So I took Jimmy and Kate by the hand and muttered a blessing that I am afraid sounded to them like mockery, and left them.

The great burden of the poor, as I see it, is not so much the lack of food or clothing or pleasure as the lack of decency. When something ugly comes into the lives of the well-to-do, they can swathe themselves in a protecting luxury, or they can separate themselves from it by a thousand miles—or at least by the thickness of a wall. But the poor must live naked with their sins and misfortunes always.

There was no choice for those two. They had no money to set up a separate home. They could not, and would not, have given Robert into the care of others. They went straight from their marriage into the Martins' three-roomed cottage without a day in which to adjust themselves to their future. It was raw—raw life.

What happened in those first hours only those three know. And yet I can see it. I saw it at the time like a series of inexorable pictures. I saw Kate prepare their supper. I saw Robert take his food from her hands. I saw those two eat under his eyes. I seemed to feel in my own flesh their cring-

ing—not so much from his malice as from the stark shamefulness of it all. And then the night comes. They smooth his bed for him. They try to say something, but they are too inarticulate—too helpless. I can see his dead white face seamed with passion.

At last they go upstairs. The candlelight climbs higher and higher, and then it is all dark with Robert Martin. He can lie there on his useless back and stare up at the black ceiling and think whatever thoughts are given him. Knowing him as he was, I have to turn away from that picture and hide myself.

For seven months I did not cross the threshold of their cottage. You may be sure it was not Robert's pitiful violence that kept me away. It was rather the feeling that makes one avoid a place of bereavement and look away from people who are suffering. But the instinct translated itself among the villagers into a superstition. Their imaginations, that are still shadowed by witchcraft and old pagan fancies, began to see in that silent, melancholy place something ominous and accursed. They spoke of it under their breath. They began to whisper of happenings, that, though different, were perhaps no blacker than the reality. Their pity became an uneasy shrinking. As time went on the feeling spread till the nightmare of that household overshadowed the whole village.

At first I tried to keep in touch with Jimmy and Kate, and to offer them whatever comfort I could in my friendship and sympathy; but they avoided me

as they avoided every one. Jimmy worked away from the village as much as possible, and only returned at night; and Kate rarely went farther than her garden. Sometimes she went to meet him, for I used to meet them both at dusk, walking close to one another and in silence. They passed me always with the same furtive "Good night, sir," and to my troubled fancy they were like galley-slaves dragging their invisible chains. Then as spring advanced Jimmy walked alone, and it was only in church that I saw them together. They sat apart from the rest of the congregation in the shadow of the wall, and by their sad faces lifted to me in the pulpit, and by the gentle care he showed her, I knew that somehow their tormented love survived.

July came, and a day that I have never forgotten. It seems to me that even now by the mere effort of memory I can conjure back the oppression and inexpressible unquiet which beset me and, I think, beset us all. I could neither work nor rest. A sullen, suffocating heat hung from a leaden sky. Not a breath of wind stirred. The evening was ominous, and towards nine o'clock the first clap of thunder burst in a reverberating explosion over the hills. But it did not rain. A few minutes later the wind rose and became almost instantly a hurricane, which bore down upon us like the breath of a raging fever. Darkness descended, and I was just closing my study window against the cloud of dust that was being whirled up from the road, when I heard a voice call me. I waited, and a moment later I saw a woman

fighting her way across the lawn. I ran out to meet her, for she was old, and the storm nearly swept her from her feet.

"If you please, sir," she panted, "and would you come at once—the Martins—Mrs. Martin—her time's come—she's very poorly—they don't think —she'll come through—she's asking for you——"

I did not wait even to fetch my hat. In silence, for the wind and dust half choked us, we made our way into the lane which led to the Martins' cottage. It was pitch dark under the trees, but there was still a glimmer of daylight overhead, and I could see the branches waving like the arms of maniacs.

"The poor thing!" I heard my companion gasp. "The poor thing——"

But she did not come with me beyond the garden gate. You see, there was a curse upon the place.

The door was unlatched, and flew open with a crash before the wind. It took all my strength to shut it again, for I was dazed and breathless, and when I turned I saw Jimmy Martin standing opposite me. He was doing nothing. He looked to me as though he might have been standing there for a long time in that helpless, will-less inertia. His arms hung limp at his side. His features might have been carved in wood. His eyes were glassy. He tried hard to say something to me, but no sound came from him.

Against my will, drawn by sheer repugnance, I turned to the other occupant of the room. Either

Robert was unaware of my presence, or he had forgotten his anger against me. He lay there on his back and stared up at the ceiling. The expression on his dark, sunken face was blank. And yet—or perhaps it was just my excited fancy—it might also have been a mask which covered thinly something like satisfaction.

Then some one came down the narrow, creaking stairs. It was the doctor, an old crony of mine, who gave me a nod of grave welcome.

"I'm glad you've come," he said in an undertone. "She's been wanting you, and it will ease her to know you're here. But you're no good just now. This is my fight. Can you stay?"

"As long as I can hope to be of any help," I said.

Again I saw that Jimmy was trying to speak. The doctor glanced at him.

"It's going to be a hard business, Martin," he said, "but you know we'll do our best. If she'd only lend us a hand—but she seems not to care. There's no fight in her." He added solemnly: "If there is anything any one could do to ease her mind—to encourage her—let them do it now whilst there is time."

I thought he looked at Robert, but no one spoke, and Robert's face did not change by a flicker, and the doctor went slowly and heavily up the stairs again.

I took Jimmy's hand, and he returned my pressure convulsively. He would not let my hand go. His grip was clammy and desperate like that of a drown-

ing man. I made him sit down, but he could not relax. He remained rigid, staring in front of him, listening—waiting.

Quite suddenly and clearly he spoke.

"She couldn't stand it no more," he said.

That was all. It was not an accusation nor even an appeal. It was as though she were already dead, and he explained why she had died. And there was Robert with his eyes fixed on the ceiling.

I began to pray. It was not a clerical formality on my part. I had to. I tell you no mediæval priest was more haunted by a belief in a personal and present devil than I was at that moment. I suppose, too, I was shaken by the whole atmosphere of the place, and by the demonic howl of the storm outside. But I know that I have never prayed like that since. I do not remember what I asked for—not for Kate's life, for at that moment it would have seemed to me no blessing. It must have been for mercy on us all, and for the secret good that lies hidden in our hearts. It seemed to me that I was fighting something, and that I was being driven back and overwhelmed. My prayers seemed to fall back upon me, lifeless. And all the time I prayed the wind rushed in through the chinks and crannies, and sent the shadows scudding before it like mad things. The thunder broke immediately overhead. We could almost hear the dry crackling of the lightning.

The heat was awful. My breath laboured. I felt as though my skull were splitting, and I thought of Kate up there under that low stifling roof. In a

kind of fever I prayed for rain to bring us relief.

Then came a lull, and we heard a sound that was no part of the storm. It had a quality that I cannot forget. It seemed to reach right down and tear at the roots of one's soul. It was low and long and terrible. It brought Jimmy and me to our feet, staring at each other in horror-stricken unbelief. But it came again. It encompassed us as though it poured in upon us through the very walls.

A cry of unendurable human agony.

I saw Jimmy's face grow sallow. At every fresh outburst he shook as though his own body was being torn asunder. He grew old under my eyes.

I do not know how long that lasted. It must have been for over an hour. I had forgotten Robert—I had forgotten everything but that terrible crying. But suddenly a great groan burst from Jimmy's lips, and he turned and flung himself on his knees at his brother's side.

"Oh, Bob—Bob," he cried. "Don't you be angry with us no more. Take your curse from us, Bob. Take it from poor Kate. For it weren't her fault—it weren't no one's fault. We couldn't help loving. We'd fought against it all we could—for your sake, Bob, because we knowed how it would be with you—but it weren't no good. Don't you be angry—not with her, Bob. Let me have it all. Bob, you was always kind to poor things in pain—little hurt animals and such—and you love Kate, too. Don't you make her suffer no more——"

I can see him now, clawing the bedclothes in the

agony of his appeal. But Robert lay quite still, staring up at the ceiling. He was so quiet that for a moment I thought that he was dead.

Then Jimmy crumbled up in a heap, face downwards, on the bed at his brother's feet. He did not move or speak again all through that night.

That cry was as regular as the beat of a pulse. I could not pray any more. I was beaten. I was losing my personality. I do not know whether I can make you understand—I seemed to be dissolving in that cry. I was no longer an isolated human being—I was an infinitesimal part of a great unity—I was a drop in a vast ocean of human suffering—I and Jimmy and Kate, and Robert, and the whole world.

Even Robert. He could not escape. I saw his hands twist themselves in the bedclothes, and the sweat break out and run down his face. And all at once I forgot our agony. I felt that I was witnessing some stupendous drama—that something more than mortal life was being born in that tumult and darkness. I kept on repeating to myself:

"And God breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul——"

Then the rain came. It broke over us in a deluge that threatened to sweep the cottage from its foundations. The hot, feverish air grew moist and cool. The wind dropped. The thunder rolled like great chariot wheels into the distance, and even the crying overhead was hushed. It seemed to me that the

whole racked and tortured universe had gone down in that overwhelming flood.

So the night wore on, and no one spoke or moved. The dawn came greyly through the window. I opened the door, letting in a breath of its dank sweetness. The rain had lost its violence. It fell lightly and tenderly like a benediction.

I heard some one come wearily down the stairs. I turned and saw the doctor bending over Jimmy's prostrate body.

"You have a son, Martin," he said. "Thank God, both of them will live."

But Jimmy did not move. I looked at Robert. And he had turned his face to the wall.

It was a long while before Kate came down into the living-room. She was very weak, and perhaps another woman would have died. But her old serene courage had been given back to her.

I came to see her every day without hindrance. Robert never looked at me. He was always silent now. But there was nothing sullen in his silence. It seemed to me that he was just absorbed in something beyond our knowledge. His eyes lost their look of burning, thwarted desire, and grew calm and satisfied.

It happened that I was with them when Kate came down for the first time. Jimmy carried her baby for her as far as the bottom of the stairs, and then she turned and took it from him. She went over to Robert and stood at his side looking down at him.

And he looked back at her steadily for a long time. It was as though some understanding had passed between them. Then Robert made a little movement, and Kate laid the child in the circle of his arm.

That is the whole story. To me it is very wonderful, but, then, perhaps I am losing my sense of proportion. As I told you, nothing happens in this little place.

They are very happy. Robert has learnt basket-making, and helps to support the family, and as things go in these parts, they are well off. The villagers are in and out of the cottage the whole day long. They bring their troubles and their joys to the crippled man as though they know that he has some special greater knowledge.

I think it pleases him.

There are two children now. They play round Robert as they would in the friendly shadow of some great, storm-battered oak.

If you come with me one day you shall see them for yourself.

# IV

## *Pas de Quatre*

### I

DOCTOR ROSSLYN waited until the consultant physician had climbed into his car. Then he closed the door and went back up the broad shallow staircase. He reflected that though the consultant was an able diagnostician there were some things he hadn't discovered in this particular case. He hadn't guessed, for instance, what lay behind his younger colleague's professional gravity. And yet Rosslyn felt that the truth had been staring out of his eyes—emanating from his whole body.

The old man had merely patted him on the back.

"You look as though you wanted a holiday, my dear fellow."

Doctors always ordered people holidays. Rosslyn had done it himself repeatedly, especially when at a loss. He saw now how absurd it was and how ironically his patients must have smiled to themselves.

He went slowly. It had been a great strain. Now it was over. Of course he had known. At the bottom of their hearts every one had known. She herself had been the least self-deceiving of any

of them. He remembered the compassionate, enigmatic smile with which she had met his cheerful protestations and Digby's incessant plan making.

Poor Digby! He spent his life dragging one bankrupt business after another into prosperity, and he simply couldn't believe that circumstances might be too much for him. Such a lovable, pathetic ass!

Throughout, as far as Rosslyn knew, she had never flinched. If she woke at night to stare into the blackness and face the incredible, monstrous event that was drawing down upon her, by the next morning she had recovered her absolute serenity. She was wonderful—so wonderful as to be puzzling. He had seen many people take the final verdict—most of them with courage—but none of them had attained the quality of her peace. It was as though she had some sweet and secret comfort—a source of strength which she kept jealously hidden from them all. Sometimes she seemed deeply happy. Whatever it was, it made it easier to go back to her.

Digby was out. He didn't know about the consultant physician. They had treated him frankly as a child. In the end she would have to comfort him.

The room had been left in broad daylight. It was like a windless garden, the still air heavy with the scent of flowers, the Persian rugs floating their shadowy colors in a silently flowing tide of sunshine. The low, graceful Regency bed might have been a pretty boat moored in a dim backwater.

Doctor Rosslyn went across to the open windows

and drew the curtains. It wasn't that he was afraid to meet her eyes. But he wanted the intimacy of quiet and twilight. The room was too full of luxury. He would have liked to strip it bare so that he could be alone with her. Queer to think that in a little time he would not come here any more—that the short hours which made the centre and meaning of his day would be cut out.

"Well?"

The small voice just stirred the silence. He came at once and sat down on the edge of her bed. He knew that she had been watching him, drawing on those silent reserves of hers, and now he looked straight at her, grave but untroubled. He could not and would not insult her courage and their understanding of each other by an evasion. She laid her thin dry hand on his, pressing it gently.

"Well—how long?"

"He doesn't know exactly. A few weeks—perhaps two months."

She was silent a moment, reflecting.

"Thank you, Stephen."

She had never called him by his Christian name before. It astonished him somehow that she realised he had such a thing—that he had a personality outside his job of keeping people alive. It had sounded very sweet, very deliberate. He sat there, his head bent, listening, as though the sound lingered somewhere in the stillness. He guessed that it had meant a great deal to her—that she had

waited and waited, and now the signal had been given and a fast-closed door thrown wide.

"How long have we known each other?" she asked in her little far-off voice.

"About two years."

"You've looked after me all that time—fought like a Trojan, haven't you?"

"Well—I'm beaten now."

"It doesn't matter. You've been perfect. I'd like to call you Stephen, if you don't mind. My name's Claire, you know. It seems rather silly for dying people to be so formal, don't you think? That sort of thing doesn't matter any more."

He held her hand close. He felt certain that she knew and that she was saying, "Never mind. It's all right now." He was amazed to find that he was happy—extraordinarily happy, like some one who had been bound hand and foot and was suddenly set free. He sat up straight, involuntarily drawing the first deep breath of release. The color that had flooded up into his thin hard-bitten face made him look young and slightly pathetic, as all strong people look when overwhelmed by a rare feeling. She smiled at him almost light-heartedly, as though she were teasing him a little.

"Aren't you glad?"

"Glad?"

"That it's all over, that we're quite certain."

"I don't know."

"And that nothing matters except the truth?"

He considered her with his usual uncompromising

steadfastness. She lay back deep among her pillows. The exhaustion that had followed on the consultation had thrown black hollows into her cheeks and deepened the lines about her mouth. She wasn't beautiful. He had never known her beautiful. By the time she had come to him two years ago disease had already laid her youth and a famous loveliness in ruins. That, it had seemed to him at the time, had been her greatest tragedy. Digby himself had spoken of it, tears in his eyes.

"It's awful—you can't understand—you never saw her."

He was glad he had never seen her—grimly proud of a love illicit and stifled as it was—that had grown up out of such rare clean soil. Other people had loved the beautiful, happy Claire Calvert, but he had loved the disfigured, suffering woman. He remembered the day of their first meeting quite well. She had come into his consulting room and he had scarcely looked at her. Women—people generally—meant nothing to him. A patient was either a sick body or a sick ego. He was, in fact, a hard man, a fighter who had chosen disease as his enemy, and the fight was all that he cared about. He had never loved any one in his life.

He had taken Claire Calvert's hands. They were dry and withered—just symptoms. He had made the examination with the cold carefulness of a detective gathering his clues, and at last had told her the truth, as far as he knew it. Then for the first time he had met her eyes—those curious, shin-

ing, hazel eyes of hers. Perhaps unconsciously he had expected horror, consternation, tears. And she had just smiled reassuringly at him.

"Please don't worry about me, doctor."

He hadn't been worrying. She had been nothing to him. But now a shock of sheer admiration had gone over him. He had recognised in her bearing something more than either bravado or self-control —a gallant and generous spirit.

And from that moment he set himself to fight for her as he had never fought for personal victory.

It had been in vain. She had never had a chance. If she had been older—— But she was young and the disease feasted on her youth.

A few weeks—eight at the outside.

She recalled him gently.

"You do love me, don't you, Stephen?"

"Yes," he answered, with his bleak honesty.

"It's quite all right for you to say so now. Medical and domestic etiquette have to give way. I wanted just to hear you say it."

"I love you."

She closed her eyes.

"These have been the most wonderful two years of my life."

He didn't understand. But he knew that she was going to tell him at last about that secret strength of hers. He bent closer, so that he would not lose one of those faintly falling words.

"You see—people have always loved me, and it's been very lovely to be loved—but often, often I

used to think to myself that it was because I was beautiful and happy—and made people happy. Nobody knew about me—the real me—or cared. I often thought about this happening—and wondered—just how much would be left. I never dreamed that just when I was really bankrupt, with nothing to give but trouble—a great love might be given me. After all, the glory of life doesn't lie in its length, does it? I might have lived to be an old, old woman and never known how wonderful it might be."

He was deeply moved and oddly unashamed of being moved. Yet the hard logic in him wanted to reason the thing out to the end. He couldn't rest, not knowing the whole truth.

"But Digby," he said; "Digby—don't you love him?"

"Of course. No one could help it. He's so generous and anxious and faithful. So pathetic. Every day he lays his flowers at the altar of a memory."

"A memory?"

"Of the woman he loved so passionately. But I'm not that woman any more. I remember her. She was charming. They made the most lovely couple. But she's dead."

"I don't know about all that. He's breaking his heart."

Her lips quivered.

"It won't break—not quite."

"Well—whatever people mean by breaking their hearts."

She moved a little so that her face was toward the

curtained windows. Her eyes were wide open and he felt that she was seeing something that was hidden from him.

"Digby's so healthy and strong and eager. He shrinks from the very thought of death."

"That's true. He won't believe that you're not getting better. He won't believe even now."

He caught the enigmatic shadow of her smile.

"Poor Digby. He's puzzled and frightened. He wants the old me to come back dreadfully. But if I don't——"

"Well?"

"He just can't help turning toward hope."

"My dear——"

"Oh, I'm glad—frightfully glad. Stephen—the new me—the dying me, couldn't have borne the burden of such a responsibility. I'm free."

Their silence was like a deep strong tide, sweeping away the last barrier between them. In it they seemed to speak to each other for the first time. Neither knew how long it lasted.

The sound of a car turning into the gates roused them to look at each other.

"Perhaps—two months?" she whispered.

"Yes."

"Our whole lives—our very own."

He held her hand hard between both his. Something was rending him, tearing down the restraints of years. It hurt—and yet it was beautiful, too—a kind of difficult, splendid surrender. He lifted her hand and kissed it.

II

Digby felt as though some one had hit him over the heart—stunned and sick. The red heavy-headed roses which he had brought for her lay on the table, where he had put them in order to give a hand to that doctor fellow. They seemed to make fun of him. He could hear the echo of his own fatuously cheerful "Well, Rosslyn, how goes it? A bit better to-day, don't you think?" And the long glass opposite held the ghost of his laughing face. He stared at himself uncomprehendingly. For his pallor and the expression of bewildered consternation, he made a fine figure of a man—fair skinned and upright, with clear eyes and square shoulders and lean flanks. He looked so strong—the very embodiment of security. He couldn't connect himself with the thought of death—dissolution—simply couldn't. And yet in two months—at the outside—Claire—his wife—the romance of his life—would be gone—beyond his reach. The place would be empty of her forever.

His first impulse had been to rush upstairs to her, take her in his arms as he had used to do after they had been cruelly separated for a few days, and hold her fast. But then he remembered. She had to be spared all excitement, all strain. He couldn't even cry his heart out on her shoulder. He had to be calm—as brave as she was. For ten minutes he had stood there staring at himself, trying to fix on some attitude that he could take up and carry

through to the end. But everything seemed unreal and intolerable. What could one say to some one who had just been sentenced to death—some one whom one loved? How could one go on living with them—eating, sleeping, talking, with the future closing down like a shutter and the pitifully sweet past jogging one's memory? Two months? The two years had been cruel enough. But then he had been able to pretend to himself. He had been cheerful and had made plans of what they would do when she were well again. Pretense, of course, eating at one's heart, but still making life endurable.

Now there was nothing for it but surrender, a grim awful waiting face to face with the truth.

Two months. If it were only now—both of them together.

He began to move about the room. The pain seemed to have become physical. It wouldn't let him rest. Nor could he go up to her—not yet. She would understand. Finally he threw open the long French window and went down into the garden.

It was the loveliest garden of a luxurious and expensive suburb. It had been his gift to her—an integral part of his campaign. In a few weeks, by dint of a white-hot energy and prodigality, he had transformed its previous commonplaceness into a paradise of rare flowers which in the red evening sunlight shone like the jewels of a great necklace. Even now it was difficult to believe that he should have failed.

At the bottom was a private gate that led out into

the roadway. It opened and he saw a woman come up the path. He recognised her with a sensation of almost passionate relief. He was like a rudderless ship manned by a panic-stricken crew who had come suddenly in sight of land. Lucy Garfield! Claire's friend and his—some one who loved them both, whose handclasp was a thing of understanding and infinite comfort. He went to meet her, hurrying, as though he could not bear another moment of his forlornness.

He had an idea that she knew already. She was hatless, and walking quickly, too, with that bearing of quiet vigorous purpose which he liked so well. The sunlight shone on the thick ash-blond hair. The early silver scarcely showed. Not young any more —older than Claire. There was a faint hint of matronly breadth about the fine gracious figure. Yet her glowing health, her sunny and gallant temper with its undertone of womanly tenderness and pity made her one of those people whose age is of no significance. They are young forever.

She took his hand. Her own was both warm and cool, gentle and strong. Her eyes met his with a steady gravity.

"I saw the two cars," she said. "I guessed that Doctor Rosslyn had called in another opinion. I tried to wait, but I couldn't. I was too anxious."

"It's all over," he said simply. "It's a question of weeks now."

They turned and walked slowly side by side toward the house. It had been their custom to

meet like this on the fine summer evenings and to pick out the finest blooms for Claire before they went up to her together. The few minutes of her companionship had been something to look forward to. They strengthened him for the tragic ordeal of that sick room where he sat hour after hour, facing death and pretending he didn't see. If only Claire had gone on being Claire—— But she had changed. Physically he wouldn't have recognised her. But it was more than that. She had drifted away—almost out of hearing. More and more, for all his tormenting love and pity, he had felt like a stranger. He was embarrassed when Lucy left them.

"I believe I've known all along," he said.

"You've been very brave, Digby."

"No; rather a coward. I didn't dare admit it myself. It seemed incredible. She had been so lovely and full of life. You know—I used to think we were the happiest people in the world."

"I know you made her very happy."

"It's good of you to say so, Lucy. It comforts me. You've been a wonderful friend. You've known and loved Claire all your life and you might so easily have been—well—jealous or disapproving; felt that I wasn't good enough for her. But you've been my friend too."

"I wanted to be when I saw what you were to her—a perfect lover always."

He flushed deeply.

"I don't know; I've wondered lately. I seem

somehow to have lost touch; I've been stupid with wretchedness; I felt as though I were failing her."

"It's not that. My poor Claire! It's been a slow, slow dying; and dying people are all by themselves. We stretch out hands, but can't reach them any more. It's not your fault. Claire understands better than any one."

He was silent. He didn't trust his voice. She comforted him immeasurably. And yet he knew that she herself was in bitter need of comfort. He glanced swiftly at her profile and saw how pale she was—deathly pale. She loved Claire. There had always been something between these two—a rare and exquisite understanding, such as is possible only between women, which had sometimes left him outside. Somehow he hadn't minded. He loved beautiful things and he saw that it was beautiful, their closeness to each other.

Even now, when Claire was drifting away faster and faster, Lucy had somehow managed to keep close. She would follow to the very edge of the grave. At the thought a new inexplicable pang shot through him.

"Lucy, they've been rather wonderful—these two years, haven't they? I mean—life isn't just happiness, is it? I didn't know any one like Claire could be so brave and patient; or that any one could have such a friend as you have been to us."

"Oh, Digby dear, what have I done that any one wouldn't have done?"

"You've been yourself. That's all. Of course

you don't see how splendid that is. Lucy, I'm a clumsy, stupid fellow. I don't know what I should have done without you. You won't desert me?"

"Desert you?"

"You'll stand by?"

"You know I will."

He heard the puzzled reproach in her low husky voice.

"I mean—as my friend—not just because I'm Claire's husband—because—you're the only person I shall have left."

"Of course—I am your friend."

"Always?"

"Always."

The path was steep, and they stood still a moment, a little breathless, looking down at a cluster of red roses. Another day they would have picked them for her, but now the thought of flowers tasted of death. He knew that there were tears on his companion's cheeks. But he couldn't care. It was as though somewhere—inside himself—on the horizon of some inner vision a tiny spark had kindled and was brightening and glowing, and was spreading fast and till it filled the whole of him with an indescribable warmth. He had to close his eyes lest he should see what he must not see—not yet.

A maidservant stood in the open window.

"If you please, sir, the mistress asks if you and Miss Garfield would come up."

They had both started, as though for a moment they had forgotten. They turned quickly, guiltily.

Twilight covered the garden with a vague enchantment. Lucy Garfield stumbled. He gave her his arm. He knew that she had seen too. Her hand trembled with foreknowledge. A moment later she drew away from him and went on alone.

III

Claire had heard Stephen Rosslyn's car turn out of the drive. But she did not expect Digby to come to her. Not at first. He would be too terribly shaken. He would go out into the garden, and since it was Lucy's visiting time he would meet her, as he often did, and they would comfort each other. She smiled faintly to herself.

Her thoughts were very tender of them both, but they seemed a long way off. She felt toward them as an explorer might feel toward people he was leaving behind him. All that was real to her was the journey and the man who would know how to bring her safely out of harbor. Still, she wanted to do the best she could.

So she had sent for them. She wanted them together. She had an odd physical and emotional shrinking from the idea of being alone with either of them. She felt that they would try to get too near to her, lay hold of her and drag her back into being one of them. And she wasn't one of them any more. She was a person apart, with a new and different life of her own. She was dying.

She wondered if she were heartless. She tried to

recapture herself and Digby. She remembered that she had been beautiful and very gay and happy, and Digby a most perfect lover. It wasn't only his prodigal generosity. He had always done things enchantingly and splendidly mad. One night he had waited five hours in a bitter snowstorm just to see her come home from a dance, and even then he hadn't spoken to her, but had lifted his hat with a grave and gallant salute as though she had been a princess. And after they were married he had been the same. He seemed to know instinctively what other men found out too late, that love, however steadfast, is a curious and exquisite thing, able to withstand tempest and disaster, but not frost. He had been her husband, her friend and her wooer. And because of the very stuff of youth and life that was in them they had wonderful times. She remembered how they had laughed—like children.

And then death, which, had it come suddenly, would have simply broken the survivor's heart, had gently laid its hand on her and drawn her away from him. Neither of them had known quite what was happening. It had been so gradual. It was as though very slowly they had begun to speak a different language. His distress had been pitiful, but he could do nothing. His health and instinctive joy of life had been like a baffling wall between them.

In his place had come a man to whom death was the commonplace of life—a grim ungracious comrade who, for all his indifference to suffering, knew what suffering meant. He cared nothing for the

laughter and beauty which she had lost. He rarely laughed and she knew by the way he thrust aside her flowers that their beauty was hidden from him. But he had come to love her. Through the ugliness and humiliation of illness his love reached her and held her fast in its protection. It was like a miracle. It made death a revelation of life.

The door opened. She shivered a little. They were so big and strong. It was like a blast of crude rough wind. She knew that they were ashamed. And after that first moment's recoil she was sorry for their tragic embarrassment. She held out her hand and Digby caught it and kissed it. The familiar, cheery "Well, darling, how goes it?" had risen visibly to his lips and had died there. Suddenly like a boy overwhelmed with grief he dropped on his knees beside her, burying his face against her arm.

She looked at Lucy. They were two women understanding each other. They even smiled, though the tears had gathered in Lucy's eyes. Claire knew how Lucy loved her. She held out her free hand over the bowed head between them. And so they remained a moment.

"You mustn't," Claire whispered. "You mustn't be so dreadfully unhappy—either of you. My dears, it comes to every one; it will to you, you know. And I've had such a wonderful life. No one could have had more love." She felt Digby's fierce confirmative pressure, but she was not thinking of him. "I'd be content and happy—if only you were too."

He stood up almost roughly.

"Don't, Claire. You mustn't say things like that —impossible things. It's—a sort of outrage. What will my life be if you leave me——"

She thought wearily to herself, suppose she told him the truth; suppose she said, "My dear, my death will be the crisis of a long misery for you. You will suffer frightfully, but then you'll begin to get better. In a few months you will be your old self, the self you haven't been for two years—since we began to lose each other. Besides, I love Steve Rosslyn."

But of course she couldn't. Only the dying can face the truth.

"I want you to be very quiet and listen," she said faintly. "You know, the end might come any time, and there's something I want to say—to both of you. At first—I meant to say it only to Lucy. But we three love one another. We can surely trust one another."

He bent over her.

"Claire—my darling—what is it?"

She felt how difficult it was going to be. He was so simple and sincere, so desperately unhappy. He wouldn't even know that he was lying. She drew Lucy close to her as though for support. She felt that Lucy guessed and was gathering all her strength together. They two would have to manage him between them.

"In a way, of course, I don't need to ask. It will happen, sooner or later. But I wanted to make it

easy. You are both such darlings—so loyal—I wanted you to know it would make me happy."

"Claire," he began passionately, "if there was anything—my dearest, you know I'd give my life."

"Yes, dear, I do know. It's not that; not a sacrifice. Digby, you and Lucy are young still; young enough to be very happy. I want you—when the time comes—to marry each other."

He stood with his shoulders thrust back. He looked very handsome and very stern.

"Claire, you don't know what you're saying."

"Yes, I do. I've thought it all out. I haven't much strength. You mustn't make me say things over and over again. Digby, dear, you will marry. You couldn't live alone. You might marry some one to whom I should just be a hateful thought. My memory would have to be locked away in your heart and perhaps it would die for lack of freedom. I—I should hate that. You and Lucy love me. I should be safe with you."

He began passionately, "Has either of us given you any reason——"

She stopped him with a faint gesture. She was very tired. Their strength, their overflowing vigor, seemed to fill the room with tumult. She wanted to close her eyes and be alone with her dreams—with Stephen Rosslyn, the lover of her soul.

"You have been falling in love with each other for two years. You love each other. Isn't that true?"

"No," he said.

"Lucy, isn't it true?"

The two women looked at each other. Lucy Garfield was very pale, but she held herself proudly.

"Yes," she said, "it is true."

"Thank you. I was sure you would be brave. Bless you. It's all I wished; I'm quite happy."

Quite free. She closed her eyes. Digby would make a scene. He would protest and argue, defend himself. He wouldn't understand. She would just pretend.

"Lucy!"

He had turned to her with a cry of utter reproach. How could she—how dared she! It wasn't true. Worse than that—she was betraying a secret—his secret—their secret. It was a terrible thing. Breaking a dying woman's heart. His wife—the only woman he had ever loved.

"Lucy!" he whispered.

His heart seemed to die within him, and then suddenly to burst into a new, terrible and wonderful life—like a lamp overturned by a great wind that after a moment's darkness blazes up and sets everything on fire. He saw what was in Lucy's eyes. It was superb. He could have denied it only at the cost of his honour. Between these two he had grown insignificant. He had only one chance to be as big as they were.

"I——" he began.

She laid her finger to her lips, silencing him. He turned. He saw that Claire had fallen asleep.

"When she is awake I will tell her the truth, too, Lucy. I have loved you."

"She knows already," Lucy said.

IV

To the neighbors it was at first a mere headline, less thrilling than a murder or a divorce case, and having no personal interest for them.

Then some one said, "Why, there's Mrs. Calvert" —and the thing blazed up and spread like a prairie fire. They saw that their expensive and placid suburb had become the center of a modern drama. They were the onlookers at a race between life and death as titanic as any struggle from classic legend. And though they backed life to the last man, they were secretly pleased that the race was so close, so desperately close. They were very rich and very bored.

Had the discovery, made in far-off Canada, been made in time? Every resource of science had been called into action. Wireless messages flew across the Atlantic. A great Canadian specialist, armed with authority, was already on his way. The neighbours knew the name of his boat and the date and hour of its arrival. They followed its course passionately. The very weather became a factor in their calculations. They talked of the forces of cross currents and unfavourable head winds. A fog in the Channel, reported with the liner's approach to Cherbourg, brought something like consternation. Then it was heard that a special train had been ordered. Doctor Rosslyn, grim and silent, had gone to meet it.

Gallant Digby Calvert! Gallant husband!

His house looked as usual—calm and impregnable with wealth. But the passers-by, glancing up furtively at the windows, had a vision of what lay behind their sleekness—the still young, once beautiful woman, holding out hour by hour, her eyes fixed on the distance for the rescue that might still come; the man who loved her, reassuring and steady, heart-sick with dread; the faithful friend who never faltered in her courage, the household, like an ironic commentary, running smoothly on its well-oiled wheels.

No noise, no crying out. And yet the stolid walls masked scenes of unimaginable emotion. The thought of them melted the hardest and most indifferent.

When at last the great limousine swung into the drive and the two men passed through the instantly opened door a sigh of relief went up. The antagonists were locked. And all sorts of unexpected people said, "Please God, please God!"

Lucy Garfield waited with Digby in his library. Claire had wanted her. But she wished she hadn't come. The room's beautiful expensiveness irked her. It made her feel unreal, like an actress in a play. Digby seemed unreal, too, standing there with his set, white face. They hadn't spoken or looked at each other. It occurred to Lucy that they hadn't really spoken for weeks; not since that day when hope had broken on them like an unexpected dazzling light. They had avoided each other's eyes. All their strength—all their purpose—had

been set on the one point, saving Claire, and there was no "themselves" and no future.

And yet——

She glanced shyly at him. Just for a moment her tired mind slipped its leash. What was going on behind that front of stern masculinity? Was he thinking of her? No, he wouldn't dare; no more than she dared think of him. They had put their love away—out of sight. But it was there. What was happening to it in the silence and darkness? All sorts of sharp broken questions flashed by her like points of fire. She let down an iron shutter against them. They were too terrible.

It was Digby who spoke first. The loved familiar voice sent a shock along her straining nerves as though a stranger had suddenly used his tones.

"What a time they are! It's unendurable."

"I know. Perhaps it's a good sign."

"Yes. How—how was she?"

"Quite calm. You'd think she was the last person concerned."

"Oh, she's braver than any of us."

One of the forbidden thoughts leaped into her mind. It wasn't courage, not altogether. Claire didn't want to live. Her living was tragic. Because everything that had made life worth while had been taken from her. It was as though they had stripped her body before she were dead, and now, if she were not to die, she would never forget.

"Digby!"

He made a curt gesture. Some one was coming downstairs. In a minute they would know.

They looked at each other. It might well be that it was the last time they would be able to meet each other's eyes with truth. Their love that had seemed so blessed, like a treasure stowed away safely against the distant future, had become a wicked, torturing, fiercely desiring thing. They had been so innocent and loyal. They had become traitors.

Lucy closed her eyes so that she should not see what was in his any more. She saw instead, in one swift picture after another—Claire—Claire the pretty child, the gay schoolgirl, the happy lovable woman, the friend! The wonderful friend! Their friendship had been one of the sweetest things in life. They had been so proud of it. They had often said, "Nothing can ever come between us."

And now upstairs Claire was thinking to herself —oh, terrible things; true things!

The door opened. Rosslyn stood on the threshold. At the sight of him Lucy's heart seemed to leap in her breast—with what emotion she never knew. His wooden face was colorless and there was a gleam of moisture about his lips. She heard his voice, far-off and without expression:

"It's all right. We were just in time."

After what seemed an interminable, insufferable pause Digby said, "Thank God!" And at that Lucy Garfield began to laugh, and from laughter passed to the bitterest weeping.

V

They had given Claire a hand glass, and every now and again she took it up and looked at herself. And she saw that she was growing young and beautiful.

The windows stood wide open. It was a warm and lovely summer, and to-morrow she was to go out into the garden for the first time. And after that the wheels of life would begin to spin again—faster and faster. Presently she would go abroad—the Riviera probably; Monte Carlo. She smiled involuntarily. Oh, the gay days! How they had laughed sometimes. Digby understood laughter.

He was like a boy. The littlest things might hide a big glorious joke for him. An incurable boy.

Digby.

Her smile died. She had forgotten. That was all over. Digby and Lucy. Poor darlings. How unhappy they were. They tried so hard to pretend that nothing had happened, and they couldn't look her in the face. Their pitiable guiltiness hurt her. For, after all, it was her fault. It was she who had driven them into the open—just to save her own soul—to set herself free. Well, now she had to play the game—see the thing through. Besides, she wanted nothing better. It was all quite simple. She had Stephen—Stephen, the friend and comforter, who had gone down with her to the very gates of death.

She wondered if he would go with her to Monte

Carlo. She would ask him. The climate suited her. And she liked the place. At least she had been very happy there.

The door opened. There was Digby. He always came at the same time, very punctually and faithfully, with his gift of flowers for which there wasn't a spare vase. Without opening her eyes she could see his white face smiling fixedly at her.

"Well, darling, how goes it?"

He laid his hand on hers and she returned the pressure firmly. She smiled back at him and she knew her smile was as lifeless as his own. It need not have been. Life welled up in her like the waters of a secret spring. It made her impatient, almost resentful.

"Better and better. You know to-morrow I'm to be allowed into the garden."

"Splendid! We'll have a sort of reception."

"Never mind about that now. Sit down a moment. I want to talk to you. I can't bear you to be unhappy."

"Unhappy? But I'm not."

"Aren't you?" She shook her head. She hated to see him flush with shame. He had always been so frank—so proudly honest. "Oh, my dear, aren't we friends enough? Do you really imagine that I've forgotten, and that you two can put your heads in the sand and hide from me—you and Lucy? You know—nothing has really changed—except that I'm alive when I ought to be dead."

"Claire—don't, please—it's too hateful—to talk like that."

"It isn't hateful; only truthful. We three made a contract, and I've broken my share of it. I've put you in a horrible position."

"It's as though you were laughing at us—at everything."

"I'm not. Perhaps if I did——"

She broke off, sighing. It would be nice to laugh again. Only he would be so hurt. He sat there on the edge of her bed with his face hidden in his hands—pathetically young—like a schoolboy, ashamed and humiliated, driven to confession. And it wasn't his fault at all.

"Claire—I'm not a fool. Of course I've realised—I've been trying to make up my mind—I wanted you to understand how it had happened. You know—don't you?—that from the first day I set eyes on you I never looked at any one else; I never wanted to. It wasn't only that you seemed to me the loveliest woman in the world. You were my friend and my companion. Wherever I went you came, too—in spirit, in thought, in action. We two—we were just two parts of one person, weren't we?"

"Yes, dear."

"It would have gone on like that. We weren't just in love. We were real lovers. We'd have grown older—slowly—side by side—adjusting ourselves to the same measure. Then came your ill-

ness. It sounds horrible, I know—but just when you needed me most I lost touch. You see—it was as though in our—our going toward death you had run on ahead—away from me. You left me behind. And just because I loved you so I was desperately lonely."

"Digby—please—I do understand."

He almost wrung his hands.

"I know everything you must be thinking; I know how wretchedly I must have seemed to fail you. We both know. Lucy said once, 'She doesn't want to live because she feels she has lost everything.' That nearly smashed me up. To think that I of all people in the world should make you suffer."

"Dear—I haven't suffered."

His eyes were blind with tears.

"You only say that."

"But it's true. I haven't."

"For God's sake, don't be generous; it just breaks my heart."

"You see, I was in love myself."

He frowned, as though he hadn't heard clearly.

"What?"

"I am in love too."

"I don't understand. You mean—with me?"

"With Stephen."

"Stephen? In God's name—Stephen what?"

"Didn't you know that Doctor Rosslyn's name was Stephen?"

He stared at her with wide, incredulous eyes. Then to her complete astonishment he almost

shouted "The blackguard!" and strode over to the window, standing there with clenched fists, his face averted so that she could see nothing but his profile. Still, it was a very pleasing profile. Strong and sensitive and laughter-loving. She wondered, in a detached sort of way, why he couldn't laugh now. She could have laughed. But that was because of the life that was beginning to run through her like a happy song. It was getting terribly easy to be happy. And she mustn't; he would be too hurt; it wasn't fair.

"Can't you understand," she said gravely, "that I was lonely too?"

He turned reluctantly. "Lonely?"

"It is lonely—dying."

"And that fellow——"

"He came too. He was my companion. He went with me where you couldn't go. When I knew about you and Lucy I was glad. It set me free."

His voice sounded muffled and unsteady.

"Very fortunate; very convenient."

"Don't be bitter, Digby."

But she was looking at her hands, spread out on the white coverlet, and forgot what she was going to say. Her hands had worried her terribly. There had been no escape from them. She had had to watch them wither. Now they were like flowers in sunshine after a sharp frost. They were growing beautiful. They reminded her of her rings—the great diamond that Digby had given her, her favourite emerald and sapphire. To-morrow she would

wear them again. And she had locked them away forever. How strange and wonderful!

Then she remembered.

"It's no good being bitter. And why should we grudge each other happiness? Did you want me to be alone? Don't you realise that now you are free too? That's why I told you. I wanted you to feel that you had a right to each other."

He was staring at her as though she were a puzzling stranger.

"What is to happen now? What do you expect?"

"That we should all behave with dignity and kindliness. There's no need for resentment. Something has happened that can't be changed. We four have just got to go our ways."

"Lucy and I; you—and—and that man?"

"And Stephen Rosslyn," she agreed.

As she spoke they heard Rosslyn's car turn into the drive. Digby made a queer, strangled gesture, like a man desperately seeking expression, and his eyes lighting on the flowers he had brought her, he seized them and threw them out of the window.

"You don't want them anyway," he stammered.

She knew that he nearly slammed the door. It was unreasonable, but also rather touching and very young of him to want everything and everybody —the whole world. She rather wanted it herself. But she overcame the impulse to call him back and put her arms round him and kiss him.

After all, one had to choose.

And they had chosen.

VI

The two men met in the hall. Rosslyn half held out his hand and then let it drop, and the movement put him at a disadvantage and he flushed painfully so that for a moment Digby went hot with a vicarious shame.

He had never really thought of Rosslyn as a man. He had seen him as a clever, trustworthy doctor, a confidant, but nevertheless a person apart, outside their circle, not to be judged by ordinary standards. His manners and his appearance hadn't mattered. Now Digby saw that he was both clumsily made and undersized, and that however much he might pay for his clothes they would never fit him. No need to be told that he had begun life as a shoeblack. The arrogance of the self-made success and the defiant awkwardness of a man out of his element were written all over him.

And Claire loved him—Claire, who had loved Digby Calvert. Digby felt as though the earth were giving way under his feet.

Still, somebody had to behave with dignity. And he, the injured husband, at least as the——

His thoughts made a hurried jump. What he had to say could be said at once and briefly.

"Mrs. Calvert has told me," he began. "I don't know how the other members of your profession would regard your conduct and I don't propose to ask them. I intend to protect my wife as long as

she is my wife, and I shall set her free myself. That is all that I have to say to you."

He went on toward his library. He had behaved well, but he felt oddly miserable and physically almost broken. At the door he couldn't help saying, "I hope to God you'll make her happy!" in a voice that gave the formula a harsh and aching truth.

This time the door actually slammed.

Stephen Rosslyn climbed the stairs heavily. He was still flushed with shame. He wondered why she hadn't warned him. It wasn't quite fair. He had looked like a fool and a blackguard. And, anyway, what was he doing in all this mess? His life, that had seemed so certain, so grimly secure, was in pieces. He had lost control. He felt as though he were being whirled downward—Heaven knew where—on the crest of an avalanche. He couldn't think of his work. Perhaps in a few weeks he wouldn't have any work to think about. There would be a hideous scandal. He would have to begin all over again.

That was what love did to a man.

Well, he did love her. It was the one romance of his life. He had never even had a friend. He had been a lonely, morose fellow whom no one had bothered to understand. But she had understood. She had been lonely too. They had been like castaways on a desolate shore. They had come together in their bitter need.

The memory of her poor wan face, turned to greet him as though he had been the sunlight, melted his

brief resentment. It made everything worth while —every sacrifice. They would stand shoulder to shoulder against the world. He would never count the cost.

He entered her room firmly, eagerly.

His picture of her was so vivid that for a moment he stopped short, staring stupidly, as though he had blundered upon a stranger. He had forgotten. Or perhaps something had happened—had been happening a long time and he hadn't realised.

It had happened to her.

It wasn't that she hadn't always been fastidiously careful about her person. At her weakest she had clung bravely to the delicacies and decencies of civilised life. But this he knew, was different. It was something from which he instinctively recoiled—something alien and half frightened. She was like an exquisite, many-hued bird preening itself after the storm, or a butterfly that had broken from its chrysalis. The dying, necessitous human being had gone. She lay there because she chose—luxuriating and beautiful—rising slenderly out of a foam of white, her dark hair crowned with gold, and something shining in the delicate oval face that he had never seen before.

He went toward her because she was watching him and waiting. But he went heavily. She gave him her hand. How often he had kissed its piteousness, its veined and bony piteousness. She had stretched it out as though he had been a rescuer in a stormy sea, and he knew that his touch and his kiss

had comforted her. But to-day her gesture was full of a subtle challenge which made him hold back. He stood there, stiff and stupid, looking down at her, and the smile faded from her lips.

"I have just seen—your husband," he said. "He knows."

"Yes—I told him."

"You might have warned me."

"I'm sorry. It's been a reality to me for so long that I felt as though everybody knew—in their hearts. What did he say?"

"Very little. He was generous—according to his lights."

"Digby's lights aren't bad," she interposed. "And he has always been generous—in everything."

"He said he would set you free."

She shook her head.

"We couldn't allow that, could we, Stephen? After all, he'd go on living with me. It's we who are running away. We must pay the price."

She had seemed to ask his agreement. But he knew she had stated her deliberate decision.

To a woman of her class it wouldn't matter much. She would live it down. Wealth and position would buffer her from a temporary discomfort. And she didn't think of him. But he saw himself, torn from his roots, trailed at her heels into a glittering life that was strange and horrible as a nightmare.

"Yes, of course," he said.

"We must go soon, Stephen. Before everything becomes intolerable."

His mind ran to his patients. There was Colonel Anstruther—an extraordinary case—it would have been a feather in his cap. But now——

"You're not strong enough," he objected.

"Oh, yes, I am; strong enough to get out of this quickly; but not strong enough to stay."

"My work——"

"Get some one to take your place temporarily. Afterward—— Of course we could never come back here."

Something hot welled up in him. How calmly she took it! The thing for which he had starved and sweated tossed aside like a worn-out dress. "I have money enough for us both," she said.

"But I couldn't——" he began violently.

She pressed his hand—a convulsive pressure.

"Stephen, I'm sorry; that was crude and brutal of me. I—I was thinking of—of—ways and means—how to escape. But of course I understand. You couldn't give up your work—not for always."

"I shall have to," he said. "Even if I'm not struck off the register it isn't likely any one will come to a man who—who—did what I am going to do."

"But you can take up research? You've always wanted to. You shall have the finest laboratory in the world."

There was something feverish and almost panic-stricken about her. It was as though she were afraid and were trying to bribe him. She was clinging to him. When she had been ill and ugly she had clung to him, and he had been proud and happy. But

now he had a violent physical impulse to get away, out of reach of that white hand—that delicate, repellent perfume.

"It's awfully good of you," he brought over his stiff lips.

"Stephen—you think it's worth while? You still want me?"

"I am not the sort of man to change my mind," he said with a kindling defiance. Then, half ashamed, he stammered hastily, "I've never loved any one else. I—I couldn't live without you. Surely you know that."

Their eyes met. She closed hers instantly as though overcome by a sudden exhaustion. But he suspected her. She was acting. She wasn't tired at all. She hadn't wanted to meet his eyes. She had been afraid; as afraid as he was himself.

And only a few weeks ago her dying gaze had hung on him. They had sat for minutes together, silent, their souls locked, their sight piercing the outer shell to their very innermost selves.

He didn't know what to do or say. The old clumsiness which had always paralysed him the moment he had to do with people outside his profession held him blankly silent. In a kind of panic his fingers slid to her pulse.

She answered with a faint start. The movement had been so unexpected, so utterly incongruous. It had been part of his routine when she had been dying, but as a lover there was something tragically funny about it.

She felt laughter—a scornful ironical laughter—rise in her throat.

"Dear Stephen, I'm all right. Don't."

She had to look at him. He had taken out his watch and was staring at it with an absurd fixity. She saw his red bony wrist, which always gave one the unjustifiable impression that he had forgotten his cuffs. His tie had come up over the top of his collar. There was something about his neck, determined, capable and commonplace, which made her think of a back parlor and fumed oak. She could almost smell the atmosphere.

And she was going to live with him all the rest of her days. She was going to ask him to go to Monte Carlo.

Suddenly the laughter was too much for her. It broke from her like a cascade—so gay, so sweet sounding that she lay back, breathless and listening as though to the echo of music. Why, she hadn't laughed like that for two years. A spell had broken. The room threw off its pall of dim melancholy. The world lay outside waiting for her.

Stephen Rosslyn had let her wrist drop. He stood up. He felt that some one had slapped him across the face—slapped him awake. He found himself in a room full of flowers and sunlight and rich and expensive useless things—with a strange woman. The strange woman was frighteningly beautiful.

And she was laughing at him.

VII

It was a celebration. The garden made a fitting background. Digby couldn't help being proud of it. The sunshine and the blue sky, paling to twilight, made the prettily dressed women look like living flowers, and the men their sombre, careful gardeners. Claire sat in the midst of them. She was radiant. Wherever he went Digby seemed to see her. Her voice, low and gentle, transcended the confused murmur by sheer sweetness. In the old days it had been such fun—stealing wicked glances at each other: "Oh, my darling, how lovely when all these stupid people have gone!" But now she never looked at him.

"It's nothing short of a resurrection," some one commented congratulatingly.

But it was Lucy who told the truth.

"She has grown more beautiful than ever," she said.

They stood together on the edge of the group that surrounded Claire like a court. Digby didn't want to be there. It wasn't dignified. He had tried to keep away. But he was drawn back each time as though by a fine strong thread. He made himself talk to Lucy.

"I shall be thankful when it's all over," he said. "It's a wretched farce. It makes me feel utterly unreal."

"Sometimes I have to pinch myself to make sure

I am really awake," Lucy said. "After all, Claire and I have been such friends."

Her point of view seemed to him very trivial. What did a mere friendship matter? A friendship between women. Negligible. That weak-kneed hound, Rosslyn!

"Of course I can't interfere," he said. "Everybody makes their own fate. But what she sees in him, God alone knows."

"What do you see in me, my dear?" Lucy asked.

He said "Ah!" gallantly, and looked at her with a smile which in spite of himself grew a little stiff. It was probably the faërie quality of the summer twilight and Claire's fragile loveliness that made Lucy seem unexpectedly set and elderly. He hadn't noticed, before, her undoubted tendency toward—stoutness. He had thought of her as a sort of Ceres. He hoped she wouldn't overdo things. But she would make an excellent traveling companion—capable and reasonable. Much better than Claire, who always insisted on at least four hatboxes. He remembered that time on the Italian frontier on their way to Monte Carlo, and laughed out loud. He couldn't have helped himself. It had been so frightfully funny. They had sat in their sleeper afterwards absolutely doubled up with the jolly pain of it.

Claire had heard him laugh. She turned her head involuntarily, and their eyes met. He was horribly ashamed. She must have thought that he was enjoying himself with Lucy.

"I was remembering that customhouse fellow we met," he stammered. "I don't know why. He just came into my mind."

He spoke with unnecessary loudness, and every one turned to listen. They expected him to tell the story. A faint rose had crept into Claire's cheeks. He could have killed himself. It was a ghastly, inexcusable thing to have said under the circumstances. And he wasn't really crude and tactless. Only he hadn't wanted her to think——

"Digby is a big schoolboy," Claire murmured excusingly. "A joke will go on amusing him for years."

She turned the conversation. He knew that she had meant to snub him, but he was resentfully sure that she wasn't as casual as she seemed. She would have been more—or less—than human if she hadn't remembered it, too—that sweet Italian morning.

And there was that Rosslyn fellow. Of course he had to be there. In a way, he was the hero of the afternoon. Oh, very much the hero. He had saved her life. Good Lord, he looked as though he had slept in that coat! He didn't seem to know what to do with his hands or his mouth. And Claire loved him! There were things beyond mortal understanding.

"Look here, Lucy. We can't go on like this. It isn't endurable. I'm ready if you are. The sooner we cut the painter and get off, the better. To-morrow, if you can manage it."

"To-morrow," she brooded.

He felt a rush of impatience. She might make a good traveller, but she would be a precious slow one. Everything would have to be done with order and reason. Not like Claire, who was ready at a moment's notice to dash off to the most absurd places—hatboxes and all. That time they had set off for Cairo, for instance; and landed in Honolulu.

He heard Lucy's voice—warm, maternal, a trifle fat sounding perhaps. Oh, he loved her deeply, deeply. A true friend. No man could ask more. Still, a true friend ought not to run off with a friend's husband.

"Are you sure, Digby, that you want to go?"

"Do you think I am the sort of man to change my mind?" he asked sternly.

"I'll let you know," she considered. "I'll write you. You'll get my letter to-morrow morning. Don't plan anything till then."

"Oh, well," he muttered. "Why should we make such a fuss? We can buy things on our way."

Her kindly mouth tightened a little. He was a dear, dear fellow. Just the husband for happy, light-hearted Claire. But a trifle obtuse—insensitive. He couldn't see what she was giving up. Not her reputation, her place in the world; that didn't matter. But Claire—Claire's love. People never believed how dear women could be to one another. Claire had been something wonderful in her life—an exquisite, serene and sunny refuge of understanding that would have been stronger than death or separation. Even if they had never seen each other

again it wouldn't have mattered. But now this had happened—this stupid, awful, silly catastrophe—and everything would be spoiled. Digby would stand between them like a sword cutting off their very thoughts from each other.

She stole a quick glance at her companion. She had a sudden quite primitive impulse to hit him. He looked so handsome and assured, as though he were convinced that any sacrifice would be worth while. She wanted to tell him, "My dear, as far as I'm concerned you're not worth one of her shoe laces," and then go up to Claire and put her arms over her shoulder and say, "Let's begin all over again. It's been too silly. Let's forget the tiresome fellow."

She caught Claire's eyes. She thought that there was something half wistful, half pleading in their momentary steadiness. Perhaps she was thinking, too, "How silly!"

"I think I'll go now," Lucy said.

"I'll walk with you to the gate," Digby returned courteously.

They strode over the thick deep lawn in bleak silence. They shook hands.

"To-morrow, I suppose, I shall have to kiss him," Lucy thought.

They had never kissed each other.

"I wonder if she always wears such unbecoming hats," Digby reflected. Aloud he said in a harsh undertone, "Don't keep me waiting, Lucy."

"I shall write to-night."

"I can't stick it much longer. And it isn't fair to Claire."

She walked on a few steps, and then stopped, leaning reflectively on her parasol.

"She doesn't love him," she said.

"Doesn't—what?"

"Not now. It just happens that there are some people who are nice to die with. You don't necessarily want to live with them."

"Lucy——"

She nodded over her shoulder.

"You're a dear child, Digby, but very stupid. I'll write."

He stared after her till she turned the corner of the lane. He didn't know what she meant. His brain reeled. But he felt that under given circumstances he might conceivably stop hating her.

Claire had watched the two go off side by side through the dusk. She knew that Digby was frightfully unhappy by the droop of his shoulders, which had never drooped. She wondered why that customhouse official had come into his mind from nowhere, as it seemed. Unless, of course, he had been planning things with Lucy. Nothing was more likely. And yet—— He could hardly have forgotten something else; something that had happened afterward, when the laughter had passed over them like a happy wind—how they had sat, hand in hand, watching the dawn break, thanking God secretly in a light-hearted awe-struck gratitude —for being so happy with each other.

He wouldn't laugh much with Lucy. Lucy was serious minded at bottom. Her sense of humour was quiet and elderly. She had been born elderly. Claire felt that Digby and she had been born hopelessly and incurably young. That was why Lucy had been so precious to them both.

His wonderful, jolly laughter—the gay, wonderful days! Supposing she had never been ill—— It would have been then as he said—they would have grown old side by side, kept step. They would have learned whatever life had to teach them of pain and death together.

Well, what had happened had happened. You couldn't go back. You had to go on.

She made Stephen Rosslyn stand quite close to her; she seemed to be talking lightly to him.

"You see, I am strong enough. Meet me at the station to-morrow. The seven o'clock express. We can't wait. It isn't decent."

He nodded, but did not answer. His face was without color or expression. He felt like a wild beast that had been caught and made into an exhibition for a crowd of fools. He hated them all. He wanted to kill them. But also he was afraid. He wanted frantically to escape. And he knew that there was no escape possible.

Digby drifted back into the group, and Claire stood up. She gave her hand to those nearest her. Her voice was a little breathless.

"You mustn't mind my going. It's been wonder-

ful. A real coming back to life. But now I'm tired."

"When you have been away——" some one began.

"Ah, that will be a second honeymoon," another voice broke in teasingly. "You will have begun all over again."

Through the dusk their eyes met. And suddenly Claire heard herself laugh—just as she had done before—only not bitterly, nor ironically, but with an irrepressible sense of all the joy of life.

"That will be worth dying for," she said.

VIII

Digby waited at the gate long after the last guest had gone. Then he walked slowly back. It was dark now, with the velvet, unreal darkness of a summer's night. The chairs and tables had been left just as they were, and he picked out Claire's place and stood still, staring at it as though he expected to see her ghost. He came closer. He found himself touching the wicker arm, timidly at first and then in an agony of tenderness. He said her name aloud. He didn't care. The world might know. He loved her. He loved her as he had never loved her. And it was too late. They were being torn from each other.

Her lighted window sent a square of shining green on to the black grass. Its brightness hurt him like a knife in the heart. It made him feel utterly outcast. How often before their marriage he had

paced, a gallant, reckless lover, beneath her window and looked up, thinking, "One day!" And now she was going. Another man—that drear, mannerless, little upstart, Rosslyn—would take his place, would wait, as he had once waited in a tropic garden, for her signal; would hear her beloved voice, her beloved laughter.

He walked up and down, up and down. Why, she had laughed to-night—suddenly, at her own thoughts. She had looked at him. It had been too dark to read her eyes. And yet——

The air was thick with the scent of flowers. He felt crazed with its sweetness. His heart pounded in his breast with pain, with a gathering fury. He would kill Rosslyn—Lucy—himself—every one; there should be an awful holocaust.

There was no escape. None. As a man of honour, he had to go. Even now Lucy might be writing.

Lucy! He stopped short. What had she meant? Why had she told him? There had been something peculiar in Lucy's manner. Was it possible? It couldn't be! Lucy was desperately in love. At least—she had said so. Once. Not desperately perhaps. It couldn't be that she too——

He put his hands to his head.

The light had gone out. He stared up, breathless, expectant. He could almost feel her behind the darkness. His hands dropped, clenched, to his side.

Lucy had said, "She doesn't love him." Lucy was wise. Lucy was their friend. If it was true,

then Claire, too, was going because she, too, was a person of honour. Even Rosslyn himself, ill-bred beggar that he was, might be a victim.

And if Claire didn't love Rosslyn, then whom did she love? She loved some one. Love had been in that laugh—in that low-spoken sentence.

"Worth dying for."

Why had it been so dark that he had not read her eyes? Then he would have known. And to-morrow it would be too late.

He made up his mind. He would see her—now. He would tell her the truth. He did not love Lucy. He was not going with her. He couldn't. There was no code existent that forced a man to be unfaithful to his wife. He would go away—alone—forever—to the ends of the earth.

He turned to the door. Then a thought seized him—daring, reckless, neck or nothing. Her window overlooked a porch. He was young enough still—more than enough in love—and a lover by instinct.

The moon came up over the trees and watched him. There was no sound in the whole world, listening and agape, but the tearing of the ivy under his groping hands. At any moment he might be made ridiculous forever—a man burgling his own house with the front door wide open, laying infatuated siege to his own wife. He didn't care. No lover had ever cared.

He reached her window. He sat on her sill, balancing himself, hushing his broken breath. He

could just see her, faint as a wraith. The moon threw his own shadow, black and strong, on the silver floor.

"Claire."

He knew suddenly that he would not go alone.

She had been waiting for him.

A little laugh gathered in his throat. He leaned toward her, whispering, like a conspirator.

"There's a train—to-morrow—early—for Timbuktu. They'll never catch us. Sweetheart, won't you run away with me?"

# V

## *Greatness and Jamey Pobjoy*

### I

DID Jamey Pobjoy himself realise that he had come to the turning-point of his life? He smiles and shrugs his shoulders. He cannot or will not remember. Mrs. Pobjoy, Sr., whose imaginative powers have developed since her advent among the idle rich, will tell you that she always knew there was something queer-like about the boy that evening. Actually he sat very quietly in the place of honour between his parents. The twins, Ethel and Mabel, expressed their mingled alarm and delight at the trouncing of a policeman on the screen with a vociferousness which elected caustic comment from the audience, but young Jamey watched in alert silence. He had waited for this. He knew all about it. He had studied the pictures of the hero and heroines outside the "movies" till his midget nose had turned blue. Now he was to see them face to face. A new world was to open out before him. But it was not even then his way to betray emotion. His heart pounded in his chest. His grubby hands were clenched between his grubby knees, but in the dusk his small, white face had a look of almost professorial intentness.

"Who makes them pickshures, Pa?"

Mr. Pobjoy fidgeted impatiently. "'Ow should I know? Them Yankees, most likely."

"What's Yankees, Pa?"

"Sort of people. Shut up."

"I'd like to make pickshures, Pa."

"I'll make a pickshure of you if you don't 'old your noise. Look at every one starin' at you! Cawn't yer be'ive? The way your ma brings you up fair makes me sick."

Young Pobjoy relapsed unquenched into silence. It was the very early days of the film. Amid frantic jumps and flickerings, a Wild West story unwound itself with its inevitable saloons and sheriffs and cowboys and sweetly efficient heroines with bobbing curls and six-shooters bristling at their waists. But to Jamey they were not inevitable. He merely wondered at them. He could not have explained how it happened, but gradually his heart grew quiet, and something like a chill of disappointment crept into his blood. His tilted nose wrinkled. People didn't behave like that—nowhere. They didn't roll their eyes about that way, and when girls came out of the water they looked like drowned rats and not like curly-headed dolls in a shop-window. Young Jamey knew. Hadn't he pushed Ethel, whose curls were notorious, into a local horse trough? They weren't real, these people. He didn't care a sniff what became of them.

And then suddenly it happened. The photographer must have run amuck. He had forgotten his

business, forgotten the heroine racing hideous Death neck and neck, and had made a picture to please himself—a picture of endless space, of incredible empty distance with the ghosts of mountains shadowing the horizon. He seemed to linger over it, careless of all consequences, to rejoice in it, and all at once young Pobjoy, who had never seen a horizon other than that of chimney-pots, choked, and his small hands grew wet and tense, and his chin thrust itself out. His narrow chest rose and fell in a storm of unfamiliar, nameless emotion. It was as though something had lifted him by the scruff of his scraggy neck thousands of miles high, frightening him and filling him with a fierce, terrible happiness.

"Pa, what's that?"

"It says 'The Great Desert lay before 'er.' What's the good of all this 'ere bloomin' eddication if yer cawn't read?"

"What's a desert, Pa?"

"Oh, shut up, cawn't yer?"

"Pa——"

The scene had vanished. Instead you saw a bonfire and strange black people who danced about it lugubriously. A close-up showed a tattooed and painted savage who glowered at the audience, and then you were jerked off to a rough hillside down which minute figures rolled and slithered pell-mell towards the valley. Then another hair-raising glimpse of that great distance. A cloud of dust came rolling across it like a ball. It swept on—almost on top of you—and then just as the twins let

off an irrepressible yell of anguish, it swerved aside, breaking up into particles of racing horsemen with the tattooed and painted savage at their head. He rode bareback, and as he passed, he twirled his rifle. The audience heard his war-whoop, smelled blood.

But young Pobjoy sniffed incredulously. "What's him, Pa?"

"Cawn't yer see? 'Eagle Face,' 'e calls 'imself. 'E's a Red Injun."

"'E ain't," young Pobjoy declared.

The elder Pobjoy felt justifiably annoyed. "'E is. It says so."

"'E ain't a real Red Injun."

"Of course 'e is. Ever seen an Englishman with a mug like that?"

"'E ain't real," young Pobjoy persisted. "Not inside, 'e ain't. 'E ain't going to scalp nobody. 'E's just puttin' it on. 'E's a dud Injun. Yus, 'e is. When I makes a pickshure, it'll be a real pickshure."

Mr. and Mrs. Pobjoy cuffed him soundly and simultaneously from both sides.

## II

About six thousand miles away from Whitechapel, Son-of-His-Father rolled out from beneath a dirty blanket and, squatting tailor fashion, scratched himself drowsily. From where he sat he could see an uneven square of daylight, hazy as yet, so that the familiar mountains, which at evening crept nearer and nearer till he could have stretched

out his hand and touched them, were now rosy clouds upon the distance. But in the immediate foreground the tumbled rocks had already begun to smoulder. A wretched goat, dragging its rope, limped up from the patch of alfalfa which marked the course of a parched and dying stream, and stood dejectedly under their shadow. Over their heads, for the *hogan* itself had been built well out of reach of the stream when it became a torrent, Son-of-His-Father could see the shimmering lines of the great Santa Fé railway racing each other hotly across the desert. Whither they went he neither knew nor cared. He did not think clearly about them. Indeed he did not think much about anything except his food and the goat, both of which he loved. But he hated those iron snakes. He was always glad when night came and swallowed them. The night hated them, too. It sprang up from behind the eastern rim of the world and swooped down, taking great mouthfuls of them as it came. But it left the *hogan* and Narbona and Yunosi and Son-of-His-Father and the mountains.

Though he did not think much, there were certain things that he knew. He knew that the mountains were there always—even on the darkest nights, in the midst of snow and blinding sandstorms. When Those Above quarrelled among themselves or were angry with Son-of-His-Father because he had lost one of Narbona's dwindling flock of sheep, they threw terrible bright spears across the sky, and by their light he could see the mountains, knife-sharp

and glowing terribly, almost on top of him. But the iron snakes had disappeared. They were strangers and enemies, and every one was against them. They disappeared under the snow and under the sand, and once the great waters had come and washed them away with a laugh.

Narbona, when he was not drunk, could tell stories of a time when they had not been at all. Those had been good days for the Navajos and their brothers. Then the fat, rich lands had been theirs, and they had lived happily, fighting the Utes, and stealing sheep and horses from the Mexicans, and raiding peaceful Hopi pueblos. But the Americans had come and had toiled and sweated and died, and though the iron snakes might disappear, they came again and again. They were strangers and enemies, but they were very strong.

They were "bad medicine." Son-of-His-Father knew that, too. The rain came no more as it had done in the old days; the spring was dying, and the Navajos wandered over the face of the desert, seeking pasture. Only Narbona remained with his dwindling flock of sheep and his one goat. It was as though some evil *shamon* had thrown a spell over him, bewitching him.

Every day, when the sun had climbed to the top of the sky, an iron beast snorting fire and smoke toiled up the desert valley and stopped, panting, at the wooden depot not a thousand yards from Narbona's *hogan*. Always at that hour Narbona and Yunosi and Son-of-His-Father were in their places

in the shade of the white walls, Narbona with his beaten silver rings and bracelets, and Yunosi with her blankets, and Son-of-His-Father with his small hand outstretched wailing:

"Five cents! Five cents!"

The white men and women climbed out of the iron beast, groaning with the heat and stretching themselves. They stared at Narbona and Yunosi, handled their wares, and grumbled and haggled. They said all Indians were liars and thieves and that the thing wasn't worth half that. But Son-of-His-Father made them laugh, and they threw him cents for the fun of seeing him tumble over himself trying to catch them. They seemed sorry when the great iron bell clanged and the conductors stood with their steps ready for them to get back into the iron beast.

But Son-of-His-Father hated them.

In the evening Narbona would slink to the village store, and some one would give him fire-water in exchange for a piece of beaten silver, and he would drink himself mad. Last night he had rushed out on the desert chanting a wild, old song and had danced solemnly in the starlight.

From under his blanket, pressed against the earth wall of the *hogan,* Son-of-His-Father had heard him and shivered with fearful joy. It was as though the coyotes had learned to sing Navajo words. The stark rhythm of Narbona's song was like the beat of a drum. It had called to little Son-of-His-Father strangely to come out on the desert, and he had not

slept until the voice had died away, throbbing against the black distance.

Towards morning Yunosi had found her husband lying across the threshold of the *hogan* and had dragged him in by the long, black hair of his head and flung him down at Son-of-His-Father's side on the dirty blanket.

Son-of-His-Father could hear him snoring now. He paid no heed to him. While he scratched himself, he thought of his breakfast. It was growing brighter in the *hogan,* and he could see the dim shape of the water *ollas* and the frame of his mother's loom standing like a tired, gaunt horse waiting for the day's work to begin. Yunosi herself sat bowed over a bowl of meal which was to be their breakfast. The bold profile of her face, cut against the light of the open doorway, looked grim and stolid, and when she moved, the lank, black hair fell forward in inky streaks. Though she was Son-of-His-Father's mother, she was quite old. The lines on her face might have been carved by a knife out of redwood, and her mouth had sunken in over the empty gums. But her eyes were bright and steady and were always fixed on a far distance.

Son-of-His-Father himself was a little brown animal, lean-limbed and pot-bellied and round-faced. He had the beginnings of Yunosi's hawk's nose, but at present it was only comic. His eyes, which would one day sink back under deep brows, were wide open and pensive, and sorrowfully questioning. Would there be enough meal this time? Was it true what

Narbona and Yunosi had said yesterday, that the pasture was giving out and that the sheep were dying and that the goat must go because she was old and useless and eating more than any of them? Why didn't the rains come as they had done in the time of Barboncita, the great chief? It was because of the White Men and the great iron beast. They were bad medicine—bad medicine. Yunosi said so, and what Yunosi said was true.

Son-of-His-Father stopped scratching himself. He groped under the blanket and drew out cautiously the old, rusty hunting knife which Narbona carried in his belt. Then he crawled out, stark naked as he was, into the sunlight.

It was getting hotter every moment. The sun glared over the top of the eastern mountains. The sand burned under Son-of-His-Father's hard little feet. He ran down to the sluggish stream that crawled amid the withering alfalfa, and heaped handfuls of mud together on the parched bank. He worked hard, snorting and puffing just as the iron beast snorted and puffed when it came up the valley. And presently, when he had done, he sat back on his haunches and looked at his handiwork. No one but Son-of-His-Father could have told that the long, rapidly drying trail of mud was the great trans-continental express now lumbering its way out of the east towards destruction. But Son-of-His-Father knew. And suddenly he drove his knife into the heart of the beast, cutting and slashing, and shouting out in a childish fury.

He grew tired at last. He heard his mother calling, and a faint, familiar stir as though the world had been asleep and now at a signal shook itself and rubbed its eyes. Far away in the distance a bell clanged dolefully, warningly. Son-of-His-Father looked up. He tried not to believe what he saw. But there it was. It came up over the horizon, winding its way amid the rocks that lay tumbled over the desert valley like a giant's forgotten playthings, its iron voice chanting a passionless, relentless triumph.

Yunosi limped down the trail and caught her son by the scruff of the neck and shook him. But Son-of-His-Father did not care. He was crying bitterly for the dead gods.

He was thrust into his trousers and wound about in his blanket, and his face was wiped because for unknown reasons the White People seemed to like him better clean. Narbona sat up from his frowsy, drunken sleep and yawned and grunted, and then all three set off across the scorching stretch of sand that lay between the *hogan* and the station, Narbona leading and Son-of-His-Father and the goat trotting in the rear.

But they were late. The iron beast stood panting and exultant at its drinking trough, and the White People were already clustered round a rival Hopi family with their basket wares, and no one took much notice of Narbona's rings or of the blankets which Yunosi spread out before her. She did not appeal to them, but sat patiently, as though it were

all of no matter, looking over to the mountains which were growing dim again behind the brazen sheet of sunlight. But Son-of-His-Father pushed his way fretfully among the big White People. His heart was heavy as a stone in his breast. His voice was a plaintive, hopeless wail:

"Five cents! Five cents!"

Two large White Men who stood apart from the rest saw him and nudged each other. One of them caught hold of the tail of his blanket and offered him a nickel if he would tell them his name. But he stared at them stolidly, hating them. Two nickels, then. The man's big red face was so close to his own that he could see nothing else. And suddenly his rage flamed up again, and he struck out with his small, clenched fist on his captor's chin and mouth.

The man laughed so that he nearly lost his balance, but he had to let go his hold, and Son-of-His Father turned and ran helter-skelter, tripping over the edge of his blanket and crying with shame and fury.

The two men stood together and talked gravely.

"He's it—absolutely it. The whole three of them, for that matter. Look at them now. The perfect type."

"You won't get 'em. You know their superstitions."

"Not in these parts. They've got over all that. They're civilised."

"Civilised or degenerate?"

The other grinned cynically.

"Both," he said.

When Son-of-His-Father came back to Yunosi's side, the two White Men were talking to Narbona, who sat stolid and expressionless, saying nothing. They were serious now, and when they saw Son-of-His-Father, they looked at him curiously, and his hatred became a strange, new terror. He could not understand much of what was being said, but he caught the words "sun-pictures," and Narbona asked how much, and the taller of the White Men counted on his fingers. Then the bell clanged, and all the people began to stream back on the iron beast. But before he went, the tall White Man wrote something on a slip of paper and gave it to Narbona.

Yunosi, who had not spoken once, drew away from them, muttering to herself: "Bad medicine! Bad medicine!"

## III

From the ends of the earth Lucy May and Jamey Pobjoy and Son-of-His-Father came together in the yard of the Constellation Moving Picture Company, Hollywood, California. To assert that their meeting came by chance or as the result of the intricate workings of destiny would be to answer the riddle of the Sphinx. Jamey Pobjoy would say that he knew about Lucy May from the beginning and worked towards her deliberately, which statement is saved from complete absurdity by the fact that Jamey

Pobjoy always knew just where he wanted to get to, and the very best and shortest way of getting there.

He had grown up, as Cockneys will grow up, in defiance of the laws of heredity and hygiene, slender and delicate-looking and tough as leather. His fair head still seemed a trifle too large for him and added to the professorial gravity of his blue eyes, which gazed out from behind a pair of spectacles with an engaging innocency. His mouth was feminine and his chin mulish, and he was by a long way the most shabby, odd-looking person in a very odd-looking crowd. Though it was Jamey's first morning in the "yard," he knew all about most of his companions, whose life he had consorted with for years in the pages of movie magazines. What the movie papers had not prepared him for was Lucy May and Son-of-His-Father. Lucy May sat beside him on the wooden bench, and anybody could see with half an eye that she would never be any use as anything but a very sweet and lovable little woman. Son-of-His-Father sat opposite him, cross-legged on the ground, and looked what he was, a lazy, drink-sodden, gone-to-seed, Indian good-for-nothing. Except that he was bare-footed, he wore ordinary clothes, extraordinarily dirty long trousers, a grey sweater and a golfing cap from under which his long, greasy, black hair hung grotesquely. He spoke to no one. As far as Jamey Pobjoy could see, he never moved. He had an air of stupid, almost animal, indifference.

"Make a fine picture, wouldn't he?" Jamey said

to his neighbour, as though he had known her all his life. "I'd like to make a picture of him myself. Look at that nose."

She shook her head. She was quite unaware that they had never spoken to each other before. "He's no use, they say. He came here when he was a boy with his father, and they've tried him in odd jobs on and off ever since. But he's too stupid—too lazy. He gets horribly drunk, too—nobody knows how—and then he's dangerous. But he knows a lot of other stray Indians and can bring a whole tribe together when they're wanted. So he's useful. He just wanders about from one studio to another, waiting."

"He looks as though he could do that all right. What's his name?"

"Son-of-His-Father, I think."

"I'll make a note of it. What's yours?"

"Lucy May."

"That's pretty, anyhow. Mine's Jamey—Jamey Pobjoy."

She laughed irrepressibly. "What a funny name! You'll have to change it if you're going to do anything on the film. People would laugh."

"No, they won't. I shan't change it. My Pa and Ma are Pobjoys, and they're going to get all the credit that's coming to them."

"You're English, aren't you?"

"I've just come over."

"I thought so. That funny accent." She looked at him rather as one looks at a curio with tender

associations, and Jamey Pobjoy became fully aware of her eyes and the transparent goodness which shone out of them. "My grandfather was English, too. He came round the Cape in '49. His people had an estate—somewhere in Bow. Do you know that part?"

He smiled back at her. "Don't I! That's my part, too."

"Say, isn't that wonderful. I'll have to tell mother. She'll be so interested."

"I'd like to meet your mother," Jamey said.

She changed her ground hastily. "And you've come all that way to play in the movies?"

"For a time. Till I know all the ropes."

"You'll find it hard waiting for a chance." She sighed. "Sometimes it never comes. They take me on in the crowd scenes, but that's nothing. Of course, I'm not much good. I wouldn't try, but I'm not strong enough—not for office work."

He smiled at her again. "You'll be all right," he said.

But she had suddenly forgotten him. A wave of animation had passed over the crowd. The ingénues began to smile tensely; the mothers arranged their infants' curls into new and more engaging assortments; the habitués uncurled themselves from their slumbers. A large, good-natured looking man with a red-hot face and a sheet of paper stood among them waving them back.

"Sorry, ladies and gentlemen, not much doing today. No Wild West stuff. No kids. Soup and

fish for the next week. Any gentlemen owning dress suits dated not earlier than 1066 step forward, please. Thank you. Sorry, Miss Lucy, we've got all the nice girls we want for this show. Hello, you're new, aren't you?"

Jamey stood up. He lifted his soft hat. "My name's Pobjoy," he said. "James Pobjoy."

"Pobjoy! Gee, some name for the funny business. What are you figurin' to be?"

"A director."

Lucy May blushed for him. But she hated them all for their ribald laughter. It was too bad, guying him like that. He was a stranger, an Englishman. Englishmen never saw jokes. He wouldn't see how funny it was. Even now he stood there, grave and unmoved, as though waiting for something inevitable to happen.

The director came back a moment later. "We want a harmless lunatic," he said. "Five dollars a day. Come inside."

"Thanks."

James Pobjoy turned and bowed to Lucy May. "I'm coming to have supper at that queer place at the corner where you grab food for yourself on tin trays," he said. "You know. Six o'clock. Meet me there."

He did not wait for her to answer. She had no idea that he had made up his mind to marry her. She did not know that till three years later. He passed on at the director's heels, amid the ironical cheers of his competitors.

Slowly, reluctantly, the yard emptied. Son-of-His-Father was the last to go. Even now it was only the sun, rising above the wooden roofs of the property sheds and striking hotly down into the shadow where he squatted, that raised him from his torpor. He looked up, straight into the sun's face, then rose slowly, effortlessly, and passed out of the yard gates, shuffling the dust to clouds under his dragging feet.

IV

Jamey Pobjoy loved Lucy May as he did everything in life, with a white-hot, concentrated, deliberate fury which nothing could betray into imprudence and nothing could turn aside. As for her, she was at first very sorry for him.

Her pity did not disconcert him at all. When he had made his first picture, it would all come right. Meantime he worked with the crowd. At the end of three months he had unobtrusively wormed his way into the laboratories, from which he emerged after a short interval as about tenth-assistant to the second camera-man, whose grandfather also came from England and who showed him therefore a tolerant goodwill. For a year Jamey Pobjoy waited. Then on location, one grilling summer's day, miles from the studio, with four hundred expensive supers waiting to begin the battle of Waterloo, his chief fainted, and young Pobjoy stepped into his place. It was the opportunity which comes to every man who

deserves it. As it turned out afterwards, his stuff was excellent, and it seemed unfortunate that at the last moment the artistic temperament from which the Pobjoy family had already suffered sufficiently should have slipped its leash.

"It's a dud picture," Jamey told the director with an apparent calm which was really white-hot indignation. "It's rotten. Humans don't fight like that. Even as missing links they didn't stand about making faces at one another. It's not real."

The director said nothing, because such a thing had never happened to him before, and his everyday vocabulary was obviously inadequate. But the next morning young Pobjoy received an envelope with the pay due him and the intimation that the Constellation Film Company required his services no more.

Lucy May wept for him. But Jamey Pobjoy merely took a wad of manuscript from his desk and went over to the scenario director of the Magnum Opus Players and laid his case before him. Now the scenario director knew Jamey. For that matter every one in Hollywood knew him. He had become a joke. Though he was more restrained about it than in his early youth, his conviction that he would become a great man was well known, and to hail him as Director Pobjoy was to be sure of a responsive titter from the mob. But he was "different," and because he was different he might be anything—a genius or a lunatic—and the scenario director had the wit to take him seriously.

"Wild West stuff?" he said.

Pobjoy nodded.

"We're stacked up to the ceiling with it."

"Read it."

The scenario director read. "It's all right. It's good. What d'you want for it?"

"I don't want anything."

"Eh?"

"I want to make it myself."

"Say! And what then?"

"If it's good, you sign me up."

The scenario director mopped his brow. "Gee—of all the darned cheek!"

"It'll be all right," Jamey Pobjoy said, looking at him steadily through his glasses. "It'll be the real thing."

The scenario director thought for five minutes. "I'll put it to the boss," he said. "I don't promise."

"It'll be all right," Jamey Pobjoy said again.

And no one could have told from his calm, cast-iron countenance that he was sending up prayers to Heaven.

## V

Son-of-His-Father's childish habit of not thinking much about anything had developed so that in an ordinary way he was a mere instinct seeking food. But when he had drunk of the fire-water which Narbona had taught him to make, his mind became a monstrous panorama of dreams. He saw then things that he had never seen, and heard sounds that

he had never heard—the rush of horsemen across limitless space, the thunder of hoofs, and the long, far-off throb of the drum. He remembered, too, things long since forgotten—the *hogan* above the rocks, and Yunosi, and the mountains that at mornings were clouds upon the horizon and at night towered over him; the twin serpents racing across the desert and the iron beast.

And while his red-hot brain was busy with these dreams, he himself raged over the Santa Monica hills, screaming like a coyote, until at morning he sank down in the shadow of the deserted ranch-house where he lived, twitching with delirium.

Jamey Pobjoy, who had studied Son-of-His-Father and knew his habits, brought his camera and made a grimly successful picture. It erred perhaps on the side of realism, but it was convincing. In young Pobjoy's pet phraseology, it was real. He waited patiently until Son-of-His-Father had struggled, moaning, back to consciousness, made a final exposure, and then sat down.

"You know me, eh?" he asked. "We see each other plenty times. Me come to make Son-of-His-Father visit. Come to give him big money."

Son-of-His-Father did not answer. He lay back against the walls of his cabin, moving his head, with its covering of black and matted hair, rhythmically from side to side like an animal trying to free itself from a relentless pressure. His mouth hung open; his eyes were half-closed and filmed with wretched-

ness. His hands sprawled on their knuckles in the dust.

"Me make 'em great sun-picture," Jamey Pobjoy went on. "Son-of-His-Father plenty big fellow. Gone to the dogs. Fire-water and all. Then White Man like me come along—tell 'em stories of old days when Son-of-His-Father mighty chief and fight White Man and knock spots off him. White Man want to make 'em sun-pictures of great chief, and Son-of-His-Father remember and come back and sing 'em old songs and go out on the war-path. And all time White Man make 'em pictures—real pictures."

Son-of-His-Father tried to lift himself to his feet and failed. "Me—me no sabe——"

"No—not yet," Jamey agreed. "But you will."

Son-of-His-Father rolled over, snoring, with his face in the dust.

## VI

The faint stirring of ants in an ant-heap—the first tentative swing of inter-related wheels in a machine —the coming to life of something dead——

Son-of-His-Father sat limp in a corner of his seat. His empty eyes were fixed on the landscape sliding past him, on the orange-groves, miles upon miles of them, with their golden fruit shining like little balls of fire amid the green. But he saw nothing. He did not answer when Jamey Pobjoy, lurching down the aisle of the car, spoke to him, but shrank back into

himself as though from some painful contact. He had not been drunk for three weeks, and his parched nerves burned and twitched with suffering.

They had not given him a chance to get drunk. They had kept him in the studio, together with a band of fifty other gone-to-seed Indians who habitually hung about the employment yards waiting for easily earned money. They had not had to work much, but had lounged about the lot, gambling or sleeping. Sometimes Jamey had made sun-pictures of them, just as they were in their frowzy, white-man's dress, but more often he had sat among them and smoked and talked strange talk, of old Navajo days. He had taught them to sing old Navajo songs, singing himself from a book, painfully, seriously, beating time with his hand. And once he had danced, making them dance after him, slow, rhythmic steps that fired the blood like drink. He had beaten the dust up under his feet like a horse pawing the ground before a charge.

Son-of-His-Father had felt then the stirring of a latent sense of humour—a desire to stand still and laugh at this white man in spectacles who was so eager—so comically in earnest—so terribly in earnest. But he was frightened. He was afraid of this young man. It was he who had begun the trouble inside Son-of-His-Father's brain.

The train shook and jarred him. His companions, huddled on the unfamiliar, cushioned seats, swayed monotonously as though hypnotised. Their eyes sought him with a restless uneasy questioning.

They seemed to appeal to him. But, he was busy within himself. The shadows were growing stronger, more definite. He could almost make out their shapes—Yunosi and the *hogan* and the iron beast. It was like the beginning of one of his drunken dreams. But he was not drunk.

The cool Pacific winds had begun to fail. The orange groves thinned and became wastes of sage-brush, empty sand-hills rolling away into obscurity. The air withered. It tasted of burning dust. One by one the Magnum Opus Players slipped from the platform of the observation car back to their reservations, where they lounged, sick and stunned with the heat. But Jamey and Lucy May remained. He had given her a little part in his cast—a very little part, for he never pretended to himself that she could act—so that she should be with him. More than anything else he wanted her to see him make his first picture, to believe in him. He knew that up to now she had only liked him and been sorry.

"It's my chance," he said, "and I'm going to pull it off. I've worked hard enough. I've had this stunt in my mind for months, and when I saw that chap I knew I'd found what I'd been looking for—a dirty, down-and-out Indian with a face like—like a sick eagle. You see the idea? It's a sort of come-back —a resurrection. I've got him as a regular drunken outcast—my word, you should see the stuff I shot; it was the real thing—and now I'm going to get him as the big chief come back into his own. He'll do it. I've kept him off the drink, and I've drilled him

till I'm half a Navajo myself. I've yarned to him about his ancestors till I think he sort of believes in them—p'r'aps he had ancestors, Lord knows—and I've taught him a couple of war-dances and a good, rousing war-whoop. You see, it's got to be real. You've got to believe in things yourself."

"You're wonderful, Jamey."

"You're laughing. You wait, though."

"And is there a love-story?"

"A topping love-story."

She crept a little closer to him. "It's getting dark. How the sand stings one's face! And that queer tree—a cactus, isn't it?—like a ghost. A sentinel. Is this the desert?"

"We're getting out now. You can feel it."

"It's—it's frightening, isn't it?"

"It frightened me all right the last time. Hiding in a lot of freight. It nearly killed me."

"People used to die—of thirst—and all that. But it's different now. We're safe."

He wondered. They were rolling out into a silence so absolute that the rumble of their train was like the insolent, noisy tread of vandals in an ancient, crumbling temple. The earth lay about them, white as leprosy. And suddenly an old fear had him by the throat. He was a grubby urchin again, sitting in a dark, hot room, staring at the picture of an undreamed-of loneliness. He wanted it and feared it. He had the unforgotten sense of being lifted by the scruff of the neck to a horrific height. He had thrust himself into the hands of an inimical

power that struck the heart dead with desire and terror. He hadn't been able to help himself. He had come from the other end of the earth to face it. But safe? They didn't belong here. It was like white men to build their noisy, dirty railways where they wanted to—pushing and thrusting and elbowing their way. But they had to pay for it. They butted into secrets that were too big for them. They challenged things they didn't understand, which any moment might arouse themselves. They were as safe as that.

They were not alone now. Son-of-His-Father had come out noiselessly and stood beside them. He did not speak to them or seem to see them. He was standing straight, with his lean hands clasping the rails. The wind blew the long, black hair about his face. His head was thrown back, and they could see his nostrils quivering, scenting the desert night.

Lucy May drew back, shivering. "It frightens me," she said, "—frightens me."

## VII

They trekked out from a sleepy little depot into the desert. There were two hundred of them altogether, white men and women and Indians, and they rode on burros or in the ramshackle wagons, or trailed behind on foot. Two truck-loads of properties were to follow, and a ranch ten miles distant was sending over a hundred horses. The Magnum

Opus Company flattered itself that when it did things, it did them in style.

"You've got *carte blanche,*" the chief director had said to James Pobjoy. "You've got a good story. If you make a mess of it, we're through with you."

But he was sure that Jamey Pobjoy would not make a mess of it. He scented in him the genuine artist, the man who believes in himself and in his job.

Overnight the company had become pioneers. As people of many parts they wore their slouch hats and blank-charged revolvers gracefully, without self-consciousness. The heat and dusty wretchedness of the train were left behind. Being on location had its bright side, after all—a sort of happy-go-lucky picnic spirit. They laughed and chattered noisily. The men gave mock displays of horsemanship on their indignant mules.

It was early yet. The purple shadows still lingered at the foot of the mountains, and in the deep cañons and crevices which from the distance had a rounded, softened look. The mountains themselves were amethyst and melted into the fading rose of the morning. There was no menace yet in the cool immensity, but rather a hint of faërie, of unearthly dreams.

They passed an *arroya* and an Indian working on his field of corn. He looked up, and Jamey Pobjoy nodded to him. He was a little intoxicated with himself and with his power. He wanted to make a big thing bigger.

"You come along, too," he said. "We make 'em big sun-pictures. Plenty big money—plenty other Indians."

He pointed, and the man's eyes followed his gesture. They rested for a moment on Son-of-His-Father and his scarecrow companions in their motley white-man's clothes. They did not lose their inscrutability.

"Sun-pictures not for good Indian," he said. "Bad medicine."

He went on working, and Jamey Pobjoy kicked his mule into a trot. But for the pommel of his Mexican saddle he would assuredly have rolled off, for he could not ride at all. His long legs almost touched the ground, and his spectacles bobbed up and down on his blunt, aggressive nose. Though they rather loved him, the Magnum Opus Company winked at one another, and Lucy May, seated beside the driver in a caravan, felt tender towards him, as a mother feels towards a queer, ungainly child.

But a shadow had fallen on Jamey Pobjoy's happiness—a sort of contrition, of regret, he did not know what. He rode beside Son-of-His-Father trudging through the dust.

"You big fellow now," he said, and he tried to make his voice jolly and consoling. "You other Indians do as Big Chief Son-of-His-Father tell you. Sabe?"

They grunted answer. They hung their heads dejectedly. And he could feel their shame like a bruise.

The sun came up. Its brazen eye stared down from above the giant sandstone barriers to the east and burned up the last lingering colours of the morning. Its heat drank the veins dry; its universal glare bludgeoned the brain into a torpid consciousness of suffering. It was as though a furnace door were being slowly opened letting through a blasting, withering breath.

The Magnum Opus Players wilted and stumbled into silence. At midday they pitched camp, setting their wagons in a defensive circle for the great battle picture. Son-of-His-Father and his hundred Indians camped alone.

Jamey Pobjoy surveyed his *terrain*. He set up flags where his camera-men were to stand, and platforms where the flagmen could wig-wag his orders. The sweat ran into his eyes, and his brain reeled in a sick mist, but he could not rest. He had, indeed, a queer conviction that he dared not, that he must hurry on lest something happen, lest he himself dwindled and lost power. For the desert was awake now and aware of them, the intruders.

"We must get in the small acts before dark," he said, "if we all die for it."

In their spare moments he drove his camera-men to make stills of the desert itself. He was autocratic and pitiless, and from their point of view a laughable and rather likeable upstart. They grumbled disgustedly.

"What's bitten him? Does he think the Lizzies

want all this high-brow scenery stuff? As though the place wouldn't be there to-morrow!"

But that was what he was not certain of—where anything would be to-morrow. It was queer, this trouble that had begun to uncoil itself at the bottom of his heart—not so much fear as the certainty that somehow things were slipping out of his hands, rolling downhill of their own momentum, faster and faster. He could only try desperately to keep up with them. The white members of his cast fell silent, jaded and nerve-racked with the heat. They obeyed him, their teeth set. And the Indians, too, had changed. They wore their ancient native dress now, provided from the company's wardrobe, and to Jamey's excited fancy they were like men long dead, who had thrown off their burial clothes and stood up in flesh and blood. They had a dazed, half-awakened look.

They made their last scene for the day. In an hour the light would begin to fail, and they had rehearsed the thing a dozen times already against a burning background of rock and wilderness. It had not gone well, and Jamey Pobjoy, his script crumpled in his hand, his voice harsh with dust and weariness, cursed and pleaded.

"It's got to go—got to. Throw yourselves into it. Believe in yourselves. You—there! You son of big Navajo chief. This white man drive your father off your land—he steal 'em cattle—he kill 'em people. Now you come. You ask justice Sabe? You big man. All your fathers great war-

riors. Look it. And you—Richards"—he swung fiercely round on his leading man—"put pep into it. You've got a bad conscience. You're afraid and uneasy. Feel it. Believe in yourself."

Richards mopped himself desperately. He had never been asked to believe in himself before. He was a movie-actor—straightforward, painstaking, with a collection of labelled, stereotyped gestures. Now they were of no use, not out here, not in this desolation. The crowd of watchers, the heat, the silent, passive figure opposite him, lamed him. It was absurdly true—this fear, his gathering uneasiness. But he couldn't act it.

"Darned if I'll rehearse again. Get on with it."

"All right. Ready—action—camera—go——"

Richards strode into range. He came within a couple of feet of Son-of-His-Father, who, with his blanket about his shoulder, his arms folded, awaited him. He was genuinely angry now—with himself, but chiefly with Jamey Pobjoy and his idiotic demand for reality. Well, he'd let him have it this time. He broke, blustering, into his words:

"You infernal Indian dog! Get out of here or I'll make you!"

Jamey nodded eagerly. "Better. Carry on, both of you."

But Richards had ceased to hear even the familiar click of the camera. He was looking straight into Son-of-His-Father's face, and what he saw there he did not like. The fellow was playing up now—almost too well. The dawning look of comprehen-

sion, the twitching nostrils, the haughty gathering together of the long, lean body, stirred to life some latent antagonism in the white man's blood. This dirty good-for-nothing! This drunken studio loafer! A star part, too. It made one mad. Jamey Pobjoy must be dippy himself.

"Clear out! It's your last chance."

Son-of-His-Father sneered as he had been told to sneer. And then it exploded—the convulsive, insane irritability that gathers in men who have borne the desert sun too long. Richards, the best-loved villian of the movies, a mild and genial-tempered father of a family, lashed out, his fist crashing against the Indian's teeth.

"Cut—that's enough, for heaven's sake—cut——"

Jamey Pobjoy sprang between them. Suddenly, it seemed to him, night had peered over the black *mesa* opposite them. He had felt the Indian watchers stir. He had heard them murmur, faintly, indistinctly, like the sifting of the sand in a gust of wind. They sank back into frozen immobility. But Richards stared about him blankly, stupidly, as though a demoniac force outside himself had been responsible.

"Sorry—guess I hit too hard. Well, you asked for it."

He swung on his heel and lurched back to camp.

Son-of-His-Father lifted himself slowly from the dust. He did not hear what Jamey was saying to him. There was blood on his face, and he wiped it on his hand and stared at it, as though now, at last, something definite had been remembered.

VIII

"And so power went out of the Navajo people. They made peace, and the White Man came and took their land. Where the pasture was rich, they came. They sent my people into barren places where there was no water, and when my people had grown corn out of stones, they came again and drove them out. You have heard of the Bosco Redendo. The desert is white with the bones of my people who died there.

"My father Narbona built his *hogan* by the side of the iron serpents which travel from east to west. He was poor, and the white men cast evil spells over him, so that he forsook the ways of his people. But he remembered, and at night he sang of these things. And I remember them—I, Son-of-His-Father. I wear the sacred *Bizha* which Barboncita wore, great chief of the Navajos."

He held out the coyote's tooth which Yunosi had hung about his neck.

Faces crowded into the firelight, peering at him and at the amulet. An undertone, hot and fierce as the breathing of wolves, ran like an accompaniment to his chanting unmodulated voice. But he himself stared into the flames. They rushed up out of the earth, throwing handfuls of red stars to the moon that hung white as a bleached skull overhead. He saw there the pictures of his dreams. They were clear now. The wheels of the machine were racing faster and stronger in his brain. It was he, Son-of-

His-Father, who rode at the head of the horsemen across the desert. It was for his coming again that Yunosi had waited at the door of the old *hogan,* looking into the far distance. As he rode, he felt the burning wind in his face. He sent his horse up the secret trail that led from the black cañon up to the *mesa* heights, and from the outposts of rock looked out over the great spaces that were his people's. He watched the white men come like a cloud of dust rolling on the horizon, until the night swallowed them. The night hated them—the strangers and enemies. The desert hated them. It fought them with cloudburst and sand-storm and treacherous mirage. But there were too many of them. They came again and again like men driven by a desire stronger than the fear of death.

"The Navajo people sinned. Those Above turned their faces from them, so that when the white men came, there was no power in them. The white men have taken our land. They have cast spells over us so that we have become outcasts for them to mock at. Let us live again as men."

The goat trailed past him in the firelight, dragging its rope; the goat, his playfellow, was dead. There had not been enough to eat—never enough. The white man with the big red face offered him a stick of candy, laughing at him. A grief, ancient and tragic as the earth, was in Son-of-His-Father's heart. He did not know that he had spoken the words that Jamey Pobjoy, day after day, had drilled into his drink-stupefied brain, or that his gestures

were those of a dangling marionette. They came to him on a flood of obscure anger. He stood up straight and black as an arrow against the flames, and the Navajos stood up with him with a sound like the rustle of weapons. He sent a long, strange cry into the silence.

The white men drowsing exhaustedly by their camp-fire heard it and glanced at one another. Jamey could see Lucy May's little white hands clench themselves. He knew by the sudden, shaking clutch at his own throat how afraid she was. He hated her to be afraid. He thought how good it would be when he was on the high road to success to tell her how much he loved her. But just now she was as remote as the figure of a dream. He had almost finished his first picture, and he knew that it was big —even the camera-man said so. But a dead weight lay on his heart, an inexplicable sorrow. Perhaps it was sheer physical weakness. His limbs ached. The skin of his face was raw, and the rims of his eyes burned like fire.

Jamey, lying outside the range of firelight, lifted his head from his arms. The great *mesa* jutted out blackly like a frowning cliff into a still, white sea. The moon threw shadows beneath the mountains. It was all dead—dead as some lost valley in an old, life-forsaken earth, save for the red eye of fire and these stark, strangely-moving shadows. They, too, were not of this life nor of to-day, but of things forgotten and buried under the sand. Their song, ex-

ultant and melancholy, was the call of ghosts on their lost hunting-grounds.

"What is it? For the land's sake, what do those scallywags think they're up to now?"

"Oh, doing some moon dance or other. The Director taught it to 'em—didn't you, Pobjoy? They're rehearsing. Sounds as though they enjoyed it."

The camera-man groaned. "Well, I shan't cry when they stop. Say, I'll be glad to be tucked up again in my own downy little bed."

But Jamey Pobjoy lay still with his face between his hands. "They're real," he thought. "And we're play-acting humbugs—guying them."

And suddenly the certainty that he was to be a great man and would marry Lucy May did not matter any more. Out here it was all little and meaningless.

Son-of-His-Father on his borrowed mustang waited for the morning. The studio artist had painted his face, and they had given him a scalping knife and a tomahawk, and his eagle's feathers swept back in a fierce crest to his saddle-bow. Behind him the hundred Indian braves, clad and armed with the best that the Magnum Opus Property Department could supply, watched him patiently.

In the cool twilight the camp had laughed and chattered as they made their final preparations. Now, as the sun rose brazenly from behind the mountains, they fell silent. The champ of a horse's

bit, the thud of a hoof, sounded ominous. Even Jamey's assistant gave his orders by gestures, troubled by his own voice.

Jamey himself waded painfully through the sand. He felt ludicrous and unhappy. He wasn't even an equal come to parley, but an upstart fellow who had butted into a stranger's house and was ashamed. He stood at Son-of-His-Father's side, fumbling awkwardly with his script.

"Well, you've got the idea. You ride with your men as far as that rock, and then, when I drop the flag, you charge—full gallop—as far as that white line. Then swing off. If you don't there'll be a smash."

"I sabe." Son-of-His-Father's eyes, which had rested on the horizon, dropped for an instant to the other's face, and they were bright and wild as a hawk's. "You make 'em great sun-picture of Navajo chief. To-night all finished. White man and red man go back just same all time. Son-of-His-Father great chief no more."

Jamey faltered miserably. "I'm sorry, but you've been fine. You look it—every inch! I wish I could do something."

A kind of smile passed over the Indian's lips. He swung his mustang round. In silence the hundred followed him, and the dust curled up in a long, low cloud from under their horses' hoofs.

Jamey Pobjoy plodded back to his station beside his chief camera-man. Other operators were ambushed at the starting point of the attack and to the

right of the caravan with the huddled crowd of white men and women. It was part of Jamey's scheme that the whole scene should be taken together—that it should be as real as he could make it.

"Heaven grant it clicks the first time," Jamey's companion muttered, "and that I never see this darned wilderness again!"

"It'll click all right," Jamey said.

The cavalcade had wheeled at the flag-post. Through his glasses Jamey could see Son-of-His-Father twenty yards ahead of his followers. He himself had begun to tremble with an almost unbearable excitement.

"Ready?"

"Yep."

"Got these mountains focused?"

"Sure—I got them."

Jamey dropped the flag he held. The signal was repeated rapidly from post to post. It reached the Indians. He saw Son-of-His-Father lift his hand. It was as though the whole desert watched them, breathless. Then, on that quivering hush there fell the distant beat of a drum, at first slow and steady, and then faster like the throbbing of some wild heart.

"Gosh—what's that?"

"Their war-chant. Got it out of a book."

The camera-man licked his dry lips. "What's the good of it? It don't take. It gives me the shivers. Gee, they're coming all right now."

He cranked methodically with a hand that was not quite so firm as usual. The click of the machine mingled with the crack of empty cartridges behind them. Jamey's assistant yelled through his megaphone, and the pioneers registered fear and despair. In front of them the long, low line had become a rising cloud of dust, rolling swiftly towards them, and out of it sounded the thunder of hoofs, the beating drum, the tragic, exultant war-cry. Jamey had to set his teeth against an hysterical impulse to scream out some answering defiance. It got into the blood. It shook the foundations of the heart. He watched steadily through his glasses. Son-of-His-Father had begun to outdistance his companions. He rode alone, upright, swinging his axe in glittering circles.

"Going well, eh?"

"Too fast. There's no need—what the——" Suddenly the camera-man turned a white face over his shoulder. "Say—what's bitten them? They've crossed the line—they're coming straight on! Good God—they've run amuck—they mean mischief——"

He turned with a gasp and ran, stumbling and blundering, through the sand back to the caravan.

But Jamey Pobjoy, swearing between his teeth, leaped to the camera. The sweat of icy terror ran down his limbs, but in his heart was a delirious joy —a ruthless triumph. The artist in him surged on top, trampling underfoot Lucy May and love and fear of death and common sense. It was real—real! A frightful disaster was rushing down upon

them. They had no chance against these madmen. But if only he could make the picture—and what a picture! If only he could save the camera—throw his body over it——

Click—click—sweeter than the singing of a machine-gun.

And Son-of-His-Father, great chief of the Navajos, rode at the head of his people. His horse moved under him like an incoming wave. The desert wind was hot in his face. His blood burned with an old anger, with an older joy. There, before him, lay the enemy—the white men who had devastated his land—who had struck him in the teeth—whom he would scatter like sheep—as Barboncita, his grandsire, had scattered them. The dreams were not dreams now. To-night they would ride into the dark cañons with the bloody scalps of their enemies at their sides. They would sit by camp-fire and sing songs of victory——

He threw back his head, chanting into the wind. He heard the war-cry of his people—the feeble crack of the empty rifles—a fainter sound——

The black box. The black box on the long legs. Sun-pictures. He heard Yunosi's voice calling in his ear:

"Bad medicine—bad medicine——"

He felt his flesh grow cold, and his breath check in his throat, and a leaden powerlessness creep into his limbs. A hand, paralysing as the hand of death, laid itself on his breaking heart. Who should stand against the White Man and his spells? Had

not the goat died—and the spring gone back to the underworld? Had not his father Narbona known the truth when he sat listless and indifferent, staring into the distance?

"Bad medicine—bad medicine——"

The black box never wavered. It glared at him with its evil eye. Its mocking voice chattered at him. He groaned, faltering in his saddle, and his horse, half-turning in panic from the thing in front of it, pitched him heavily—frightfully.

After all, Son-of-His-Father was a poor horseman—a drunken Indian outcast decked in gauds not belonging to him. He lay stretched out quietly in the sand, and the men who had followed him in that frantic charge broke and scattered wildly over the desert. The brief illusion had vanished like a mirage. The power had gone out of them for ever.

A stir as of men coming slowly back to life sounded behind him. The camera-man came stumbling back, white-faced, incoherent.

"Gosh—you've got nerve all right! What happened? What stopped 'em? Evans didn't know—went on shooting the whole time—our party acted up all right—you bet—poor devils—scared stiff. Say, that was the giddiest thing ever happened. What's the matter with him? Looks like he'd broken his neck. But you got the pictures—that's the main thing—better make a 'close-up.' Say, boy, when the director sees this stuff, he'll kiss you."

But Jamey Pobjoy was looking down at Son-of-His-Father. In death the marks of shame and ruin had been wiped out. Under the poor flesh was a skeleton of a man. He lay there with his eagle's feathers spread about his head and his hand frozen upon his weapon. Somehow he had raised himself above them all. With their cameras and their play-acting they had made game of him and his tragedy. He could not fight against them and so he had died —resisting and helpless—as all wild things of the great places die before the oncoming of the white man's civilisation.

"Say—what's the idea?"

Jamey Pobjoy had unfastened the container. He flung it far out over the sand, with its precious length of film uncoiling behind it like a twisted serpent. "It's not decent"—he said chokingly—"not decent!"

Periodicals which specialise in such stories love to linger over Jamey Pobjoy's extraordinary career. But they never mention the fiasco of his first picture. They pass it over. It is beyond them. They will tell their readers that such and such a drama—with forty thousand performers—is the biggest thing he ever did.

But Lucy Pobjoy, remembering the hour she first began to love him, knows better.

# VI

## *Little Fräulein and the Big World*

### I

THE street was all grey. It was difficult to believe that there were so many tones of grey in the world. The low sky and the slanting rain, the tall, dejected houses, the shining pavements, the shop-windows, and the solitary policeman were all different and yet one-colored, so that they merged into one another and made a kind of melancholy harmony.

Even the serpent was grey.

Or, rather, it was a dragon, because it had legs —any number of them—and Fräulein Gertrude auf und zu und von Arnstein-Prütwitz—this was her full name as found in Gotha's Almanach, but fortunately most people called her Trüdchen—who had been brought up on the best fairy-stories, knew that all dragons had legs of some sort. But undoubtedly from a distance it looked more like a serpent, long and sinuous and without any of that bluff and comic violence which makes dragons almost lovable.

At any rate it was a punctual creature. Every morning at nine o'clock, when Trüdchen turned into the Kaiserstrasse—a street name that ought to have been painted out long since, but every one was

too tired and worried to bother about a detail like that—there it was, and at five minutes past nine it swallowed Fräulein auf und zu—and-all-the-rest-of-it, whole.

She was, as it were, almost its first morsel. But to-day things had gone wrong. They had been going wrong for a long time—ever since she could remember. It was like a tremendous toboggan-run. You started off slowly, everybody shouting and excited. Then you began to go fast—too fast—and then you lost control, and then suddenly everything seemed to go to pieces and fly off in a hundred different directions, and you knew it was the end.

This wasn't Trüdchen's description. It was her dream. The night before, it had kept on coming back. Her blanket, which was a temperamental thing full of moods and holes, was thinner than usual, and the cold had gnawed a hollow place in her middle just like that left by a sudden swoop down in an elevator. So that probably the dream was natural enough. But it was a very tiring dream, and when the grey winter's morning had crept through the grey curtains, Trüdchen hadn't wanted to get up, and when she did get up she had found a large hole in one of her long, black, woollen stockings and had begun to cry. Not loudly—hardly to notice, as you might say. The Arnstein-Prütwitzs were a very old family composed exclusively of heroes, and Trüdchen's father had worn an Iron Cross when they brought him home for the last time, and Trüdchen had learned quite early in life

not to cry. But this time her mother had found her sitting on the edge of her tumbled bed, the tears trickling noiselessly down a small, white face, and the woollen stocking half off, half on, with the hole showing horribly.

Her mother had sat down beside her and held her tight. She had a letter in one hand—crunched up as though with a bitter indignation—and she, too, was trembling from head to foot.

"They don't want us, Trudi. Nobody wants us. It's all my fault, darling. I've no tact, you see. God knows what will become of us!"

And then she had caught sight of the hole and had quietly fainted.

To any one else, perhaps, it might have seemed rather absurd—fainting because of a hole in a woollen stocking. But to Trüdchen it was the only reasonable thing to do. She made no fuss about it. She just crouched down by her mother's side, stroking the pretty, faded face with its frozen look of despair, and saying *"Lieb Mütterchen"* over and over again as though it had been the refrain of a sad little lullaby. And indeed she did not want her mother to wake up. For when she did wake up, she would have to think about the hole, and the hole was quite hopeless—beyond repair. It was much nicer to go on sleeping.

But it so happened that Frau Hildebrandt, who ran the little haberdashery shop behind which they had their one room, came in and said, *"Ach, du liebe Gott!"* and picked up Frau von Arnstein in her

strong arms and laid her on the bed and dashed water into her face.

"You make a cup of strong coffee, Fräulein," she commanded in her large *unter-offizier's* voice. "Quick!"

But Trüdchen couldn't. She could only stare hard into the empty cupboard. There wasn't any coffee. There wasn't anything (which was odd, when you realised that the Arnstein-Prütwitzs were such important people and that Frau von Arnstein-Prütwitz, as an officer's widow, had a pension of so many millions that Trüdchen, who was quite good at arithmetic, couldn't count them). And then suddenly she felt frightened, as she often did. She felt she couldn't bear to see her mother's white face or tell Frau Hilderbrandt about the coffee. She took her mother's purse where it lay on the table, and her basket, and set out, walking very sedately, because of being so terribly afraid. But of course it was long past nine when she turned the corner of the Kaiserstrasse, and the dragon's head had disappeared into the baker's shop, and instead of being swallowed up, she became the last minute vertebra in the creature's tail.

It took no particular notice of her. The policeman who was there to keep an eye on its behaviour and see that it didn't get out of hand and take up too much of the pavement considered her dully. The two stout women immediately in front turned to look at her, and the raindrops from their unbrellas,

which she had been anxiously avoiding, trickled down her neck.

"Ach, the little Prütwitz!" they said.

But they didn't smile. Nobody ever smiled at her, except by accident. You couldn't say that they looked angry either, but there was something at the back of their eyes which made you understand that if you touched them they would shrink away in spite of themselves. It was very puzzling, and though it had always been like that, Trüdchen never really got accustomed to it. She knew, of course, that she was a plain, disagreeable child. But then people looked at her mother, who was good and beautiful beyond question, in just the same way. And whereas Trüdchen was terribly ashamed and only wished people wouldn't look at her at all, her mother carried herself like a queen who had to live among inferior people. So that in all the little town they had only one friend—large Frau Hildebrandt who quarreled with every one.

The dragon moved terribly slowly. First it stood on one leg and then on another. It was very cold, and the rain sogged through the paper soles of its innumerable shoes. First Trüdchen's feet hurt, and then they didn't hurt at all. The dragon gave a wriggle, and its last minute vertebra was shaken loose. Trüdchen was left behind, her eyes wide with distress and astonishment. The policeman waved a gloved paw at her.

"Now then—move on there!"

It seemed to her that the dragon turned com-

pletely round to gaze at her, and her button nose grew redder with shame.

"Oh, please—I can't——"

"What's that—? Can't——?"

*"Ach, bitte, Herr Polizei,* I've lost my feet——"

For a minute it seemed as though every one were going to be nice. The policeman bent down, his hands on his thick thighs, and stared about solemnly as though he were really looking for something, and one of the stout women put down her basket and rubbed the spindly little legs in the darned black stockings until they became veritable pin-cushions, so full of pins that Trüdchen couldn't stand still, but performed a jerky dance like an alarmed marionette. But it was so wonderful to have people kind to her that she didn't mind.

Then suddenly it was over. They said, *"Na, so ist recht!"* and stood back from her and stared in just the same old way. It was as though they had remembered something they had forgotten and were thinking, "Serve you right! Serve you right!"

They were queer themselves. Even the policeman, who seemed so large and solid, made you feel that if any one touched him too roughly he might disappear altogether. And he knew. You could see the fear of it in his round, blue eyes, and the bristling, fair moustache was somehow very sad. The people were so big, and yet they weren't quite real. They were like shadows. The street was a shadow. Trüdchen could remember—or rather it was less a memory than a picture in a whole jumble of pictures

—a place full of bustling confident people, tall men in gay uniforms, and grand-dukes and princes in carriages, and bands playing music that made your heart swell, and flags flying in the sunlight, and red-cheeked boys and girls and shops that still bulged with toys and cakes and real cream. Something had happened. It was as though winter had come forever.

The clock of the Lutheran Church at the end of the street boomed twelve. By this time there was nothing left of the dragon but Trüdchen, and the woman who had rubbed her legs and said "Tsh! Tsh!" at the hole in the black stocking. They stood together in the baker's shop, which had a flustered, devastated look as though it had been swept bare by a whirlwind, and the baker's wife whispered mysteriously:

"See what I have kept for you, Frau Gephardt!" She produced a stick of bread and three shiny brown *Bretzeln* from under the counter. "I thought to myself, *'Na,* this time the Gephardt little ones shall have a treat. It's not much they get, poor things.' "

"God knows that's true, Frau Bäckerin!"

Trüdchen stood on tiptoe. She was nearly ten, but for some reason or other she hadn't grown much, and it was hard work getting the baker's wife even to see her.

"If you please, four little breads——"

And she held out her million-mark note pleadingly.

The baker's wife stood with her arms akimbo.

She had a round, tight-skinned face that must once have been pink and jolly and wasn't any more. She was fat and pale, and you felt that if any one put a pin in her she would blow up and sink to nothing, like a balloon. She had a round, hard forehead and cold blue eyes that stared down at Trüdchen with such a lack of expression that it was like hatred.

"There isn't a crumb left," she said. "Not a crumb. Tell your Frau Mutter that if the King of England wanted four little breads he couldn't have them. So there!"

She laughed, and her laugh terrified Trüdchen, because a minute before the baker's wife had been kind and smiling. So that it was she, Trüdchen, who made people feel wicked. But she couldn't move. She stood there, peering over the edge of the counter with wide-open eyes and mouth, and from the other side she must have looked like a hungry, rather stupid little minnow. Obviously it was of no use to repeat, "Please—four little breads!" and equally obvious she couldn't go home without them. Whatever else had failed in the grey frightening world the "little breads" had always stood firm. When meat soared out of sight or butter melted like a dream, there were still the four daily "little breads"—two for dinner and one for supper and one (stale) for breakfast. And if you dipped them in your *Ersatz-Kaffee,* they went further and made you feel almost full.

And now they had gone, like everything else.

The baker's wife said nothing. Her lips, thin

and anemic, were pressed tight together. She wouldn't explain. She wouldn't hold out any hope. She wasn't sorry. She was glad. Inside herself she was saying, "Serve you right! Serve you right!" and her eyes were colorless and cold like the eyes of a dead fish.

Trüdchen turned slowly away. Her legs didn't seem to belong to her. They waggled this way and that under her dwarfed and wizened little body. They were much too long and thin—all out of proportion, so that they made Fräulein auf und zu, with her short plaid skirt and tam-o'-shanter, look like one of those comic penwipers that you can make out of matches, a scrap of old duster, and a ball of wool. Only somehow she wasn't funny. Even the children in the *Gymnasium* where she went when she was strong enough, and who hated her, didn't laugh.

The woman with the basket stood in the doorway and looked back at her. She was frowning as though she were trying to make up her mind. Her mouth trembled. She might be going to smile or cry. Her face was full of kindness. Then suddenly she remembered—as every one did sooner or later. She snapped the lid of her basket, and tossed up her head, and stumped out angrily.

But Trüdchen knew that if she had been any other little girl, something wonderful would have happened.

II

One day Trüdchen's schoolmistress had told her class the story of Robinson Crusoe, and Trüdchen had said in her prim, grave way:

"I wish I could be wrecked on a desert island."

Every one had burst out into mocking laughter. And Trüdchen had set her teeth and sat very upright, swallowing her shame.

But in her heart she knew what she meant. She knew it was the truth. There was nothing terrible in being alone with bees and flowers and even wild beasts. But it was terrible to be alone in a world crowded with people. They might jostle you and almost knock you over, and yet they never really touched you. Wherever you went there was a barrier between you and them, and nobody ever crossed it even to scold, much less take you in their arms and pet you. On the other side they quarrelled, were happy or unhappy, but at any rate they belonged to one another. You were different—it was very difficult to understand in what way, because you seemed to yourself just like everybody else—and so people hated you. When you came into a shop they stopped complaining about the price of things and looked proud and aloof. The children in the *Gymnasium* walked away from you and played in another corner. The teachers changed their voices when they read out that you were top of the class. They couldn't hide how hard it was for them.

Sometimes it was worse than that. Sometimes in

a winter's dusk, coming down on a deserted street, Trüdchen could feel how all the bitter, terrible things people hid in their hearts slipped out of their hiding-places and closed in on her. She could almost see them and their lightless, hating eyes, almost feel their hands clutching at her, tweaking at her pig-tail with cruel fingers, hear their malicious whisperings. And she walked very slowly, very upright, as though she had swallowed a poker, because she was so frightened. She knew that if she began to run, she would never stop.

It was like that to-day. The winter's sky hung so low and was so grey that the street was already in twilight. The fine rain had become a deluge which had swept everybody indoors. The big drops danced on the pavements like demons. It was of no use to hug the wall. They jumped into your shoes. They dragged your clothes about you in a dank, heavy weight so that you could hardly walk. They got onto your glasses so that you were half blinded. From the pointed roofs that looked witch-like and wicked against the grey-yellow background, they came racing down together in cascades, shouting and burbling.

A great desolation was in Trüdchen's heart. She hadn't had any breakfast, and there wouldn't be any lunch or supper—unless Frau Hildebrandt took pity on them. She was wet through and cold, and there wouldn't be any fire. She thought of her mother's poor white face when she heard that there was no

bread. Perhaps she would faint again. It must be very nice to faint and forget things.

A troop of schoolchildren came swarming round the corner. They wore short mackintosh capes over the square satchels strapped on their backs, so that they looked hunchbacked and uncanny in the gloomy light, like unfriendly elves. Their faces were white and pinched, without laughter, as though the cold biting rain were the last endurable exasperation. They plodded on in silence, until suddenly a boy in the yellow cap of the *Tertium* caught sight of Trüdchen and raised a cry.

*"Sieh da—die Prütwitz—die Prütwitz——!"*

She had hoped for the best. If only this time they wouldn't see her! Quite often in the summer, when the sun was shining, they would leave her alone, but when they were hungry and cold, a kind of rage got into them, and they became like a pack of hounds. With a sinking heart she saw them turn about—hesitate, and then come drifting back.

*"Ah—ha—die Prütwitz——!"*

The terrible snigger that was always the beginning of their worst anger curled up their lips, but left their eyes cold and pitiless. They didn't look at her as though she were another child like themselves, but as though she were a strange wild beast, with curiosity and hatred. She made no attempt to escape. She stood with her back to the wall, a quaint, bedraggled figure. Her composure and prim uprightness incensed them. It looked like superiority—as though she despised them—as though they

couldn't hurt her whatever they did. She was always like that—"Trüdchen-head-in-the-air" they called her—so stiff and proper and aloof. If they had seen into her wildly beating heart with its anguish of fear and loneliness, the worst of them would have slunk away. The best might have said:

"Never mind. Come on and play with us."

But if you come of a race of heroes, you keep your wretched heart to yourself.

They hadn't touched her yet. But the circle grew narrower. They began to sharpen their stubby little forefingers at her.

"Aitch! Aitch! Aitch! *Die Engländerin!*—What has the little pig of an English girl got in her basket?"

"Plenty to eat—plenty to eat——"

"All the English pigs have plenty to eat——"

"—So that good Germans starve——"

"Aitch! Aitch!"

Somebody twitched the basket out of her hand. But its emptiness did not appease them. The first act of violence had set them free. They pinched her—pulled her hair—twisted her arms with little, mean, quick movements. And she made no resistance, but stood there patiently, keeping her eyes fixed hard on a point just above their heads. The pain was hard to bear. It was sharp and spiteful—the kind that makes you go wild with rage and hit out blindly. But what hurt was being alone and the terrible bigness of the world.

She wanted her mother. She wanted to run to

her mother and hide against her. Her mother, who was so pale and helpless, became an overshadowing, sweet figure of refuge. Only she mustn't run—and she mustn't cry. She pressed her mouth tight, and her eyes stared out round and blank through the rain-splashed glasses.

"Who killed my brother?"

"—And my father——"

"—My three brothers——"

"—Who killed her father?"

"Aitch! Aitch——!"

"P'r'aps her mother did. They say——"

Suddenly the thing she had been most afraid of happened. She couldn't bear anything any more. She was like a little mad thing with a wild, white face and flying arms and legs, hitting out frenziedly, tearing, biting—not caring. At first it was all an inextricable confusion. Everybody tumbled over every one and screamed and tried to get out of the way, for now they were frightened of her. The next minute, almost, she was through. They didn't even try to pursue her. Perhaps in a sort of way they had got what they wanted. For now she was running and crying. At least, there were no tears, but the sobs tore their way out from the very bottom of her through her open, gasping mouth. And she ran and ran, quite blindly, up one street and down another, with the rain lashing her and the wind blowing her along like a wisp of straw.

But however desperate you are, you can't run to the end of the world. There isn't any end. It's

round. And so sooner or later you have to come back to your own door.

Trüdchen stood outside. People passing would hardly have seen her, she was pressed so closely against the dripping wall. She could just see through the glass top of Frau Hildebrandt's shop window, and the jumble of goods on the counter had an eerie look in the twilight. But then Trüdchen couldn't see very well. Her glasses were broken. That meant that she could never go in. Because her mother had said:

"You mustn't break your glasses, Trudi darling—not whatever you do. You see, I *couldn't* buy another pair."

And now they were broken. And there was a long, terrible tear in the sleeve of her reefer coat. Poor little mother! Trüdchen wished—she wished—she didn't dare to think what she wished.

A light sprang up. It leaped through the door between the shop and their one room and was gone again. The door had opened and closed. Trüdchen could see Frau Hildebrandt's bulky form looming down upon her. It was like fate. Nothing could stop her. Nothing. Ominous and heavy she came—and yet not unkind either. Just inevitable.

Trüdchen said aloud:

"Oh, please—please, don't!" though she knew it was no good.

The shop-door opened with a tinkle of the bell. Frau Hildebrandt looked up the street and down the street. And then she saw Trüdchen crouched

against the wall, and stood back with a nod. Trüdchen crept in. But Frau Hildebrandt laid a heavy hand on her shoulder.

*"Armes Kindchen!"* she said.

She was crying.

And so Trüdchen knew that her wish had been given her and that her little mother was dead.

III

It seemed that when people are dead you forgive them everything. But it was rather difficult to understand why. What have the dead done? Perhaps the dead don't care anyway. But the living would have been so glad.

Trüdchen, in her new black dress and her black hat with crêpe and her new black shoes and stockings, couldn't help thinking how pleased and astonished her mother would have been at her own wonderful funeral. The *Kriegsverein* sent a deputation to walk behind the coffin with a wreath, and three officers from Hauptmann von Arnstein-Prütwitz's old regiment (in brand-new uniforms with shining epaulettes) came with another wreath and an inscription.

"To the Widow of our heroic Comrade."

The Frau Bäckerin sent a tiny bunch of flowers.

Trüdchen couldn't be really unhappy, because she felt that for the first time her poor, lonely, little mother was among friends, at peace.

On the day of the funeral there came a letter from England. Trüdchen, who had learned English from

her mother, could just read it. It was very stiff and clear. It said that of course, since her German relations would have nothing to do with her, it was necessary that Trüdchen should come to England. There was money enclosed. And would whoever was looking after Trüdchen let her grandfather, Sir Ambrose Hampden, know when and where to expect her. Although it was such a simple matter-of-fact letter, any one could have told that the writer was very bitter and unhappy about something and didn't want Trüdchen in the least.

The night before Trüdchen left for England, she and Frau Hildebrandt had a long talk about it all. Trüdchen sat up very straight and stiff at Frau Hildebrandt's table and looked through her new glasses with dry eyes. Although she was so small and poor-looking physically, she had always been top of her class, and she could think things out and understand. And she wanted to understand.

Frau Hildebrandt had been servant to Hauptmann von Arnstein-Prütwitz and his young English wife when they had first married. So she knew everything. She told Trüdchen how happy every one had been. One particular Christmas she could remember. There had been a sort of gathering of the clans. The Arnstein-Prütwitz (auf und zu und von) had come, and the Hampdens had come, and there had been tremendous jollifications with toasting, drinking and joking about *"Der Tag."*

*"Der Tag"* was to be Trüdchen's first birthday.

But before *"Der Tag"* came they were all killing one another.

At first, the war hadn't seemed to matter so much. They wrote to one another through a neutral country, and said it was a War of Governments and that it shouldn't make any difference to individuals. Then the Hampdens' only son was killed—murdered, so her father wrote—and then one by one the Prütwitz family was wiped out, and a great, implacable bitterness spread like an ulcer. And when the young English wife wrote home, she defended her new countrymen and accused her own people, and when the old Prütwitzs came, she quarreled with them so that they never came again. She fought every one—poor, exiled, uprooted, little woman, breaking her heart, until at last she had no one in the world but Trüdchen and her husband. For him, too, there was no joy left. People said he was glad of that final bullet.

All this Frau Hildebrandt told in her own way, mopping up the last drop of her *Ersatz-Kaffee* with the last fragment of a *Zwieback.* And Trüdchen watched her and thought earnestly, trying to make everything clear to herself.

"But am I really English?" she asked.

Frau Hildebrandt opened her eyes wide in horror. *"Gott bewahre!* What puts such a dreadful thought in that silly head?"

"But I must be—just a little."

*"Na*—just a little, perhaps."

"And that's why every one hates me."

"*Ach, Kindchen,* it's a bad, queer world. We poor Germans—we've suffered. The English couldn't rest until they had ruined us. God knows we are kind and easy-going. But when one is always hungry, it is difficult to forgive."

"Are all the English bad, Frau Hildebrandt?"

Frau Hildebrandt fidgeted. She was a truthful woman. It went against her principles to tell lies—even to children. "Well, God made them, *Kindchen.* He must have had His reasons. The French are worse, perhaps."

"But my mother——?"

"Ah, there now! She was a sweet soul. If only she could have been a good German! But she couldn't. Blood is blood, my dear. You can't get away from that."

"What does it mean—blood being blood, Frau Hildebrandt?"

"Eh—what? *Na,* it just means you are what you are. That's what it means."

"What am I?"

Frau Hildebrandt looked across the table. A vague alarm stirred at the bottom of her good-natured soul. She said solemnly and reassuringly:

"You are Fräulein auf und zu und von Arnstein-Prütwitz. You must never forget that. You must carry your head high, *Kindche'.* You must be your father's daughter—a real German little girl."

But Trüdchen sat very still. She didn't ask any more questions. It was of no use. Frau Hildebrandt wouldn't tell her the truth. She would have

to find it out for herself. Even now she was beginning to understand. Because of her poor little mother there was a terrible wicked taint in her blood. So that she couldn't live any more in her own country, and her own people could never love her.

IV

Perhaps going away was a little like dying. People were sorry. The Frau Bäckerin came to the station with Frau Hildebrandt and brought three *Brezel.*

"Because," she said solemnly, "it is a long journey, and you will be hungry."

And she was fidgety and rather cross as though she were worried about something.

Frau Hildebrandt tied a label round Trüdchen's neck with her name and English address and felt her pockets to see that the purse and the precious passport were all safe. Without the passport, evidently, one came to a bad end. And the guard took his tip and said, *"Jawohl,"* and looked at Trüdchen earnestly so that he should recognise her. She was so small that she might be easily overlooked. And then Trüdchen sat in her corner by the window, and the platform slid away, carrying with it two stout women, one of whom was crying. And Trüdchen would have cried, too, if she hadn't been Fräulein auf-und-zu and all the rest of it, because Frau Hildebrandt, in spite of everything, was fond of her. And

that was wonderful. But instead she sat stiffly with her hands in their little black cotton gloves folded on her lap, and her mouth compressed, and cried inside. Which, as everybody knows, is so much, much worse.

The carriage was jammed tight with people. They were all strangers, and yet they were so like everybody else that Trüdchen felt she knew them—large grey-colored people who hardly spoke, but every now and then sighed and stirred in their places like tired cattle.

The train rumbled heavily along. It didn't go very fast. It seemed jaded and reluctant like everything else. The fir-clad hills of the Black Forest dwindled till at last their black crests just peered over the horizon, as though they were saying, "Good-by—good-by, Trüdchen," and were having a last sad look at her. Then the dusk came and wiped everything out, and presently there was nothing left but a rushing darkness and the streaming torches of the station lights as they fled past. For the train was going fast now. It was desperate. It didn't care any more.

The grey people took out bags of paper and began to eat. Under the dim lamp they looked more than ever as though they were half-dead. Trüdchen couldn't eat—not even a *Brezel*. There was a hollow place where her heart was—a terrible, dragging feeling as though something very important in her inside had been torn out and she were bleeding to death. Once she sobbed aloud, and the stout, kindly-

looking man opposite her looked up from his *Butterbrötchen* in astonishment. But her eyes were dry, and she put up her hand to her mouth and said *"Verzeihung"* very solemnly so that he should think it had been a hiccough.

Every now and then the guard came in and took great bites out of her ticket. And each time he nodded to her and said:

*"Na, wie geht's?"*

And Trüdchen said, "Quite well, thank you."

He was a little, fair, bustling fellow with snappy, blue eyes, and Trüdchen thought how angry he would look if he knew the truth. It was terrible to think how every one would shrink away from her. She felt like a small black lie sitting there among all these sad, friendly people.

The stout man leaned forward. Something in his expression told her that the hiccough had been no good.

"Are you going a long way, little Fräulein?

"Yes—sir."

"It must be very lonely."

"Yes."

"Haven't you any people?"

She shook her head. If only he wouldn't ask any more questions! Every one was looking at her so kindly. They saw that she was in mourning. Poor, forlorn, little girl! The stout man leaned across and took the label and read aloud:

"Fräulein auf und zu und von Arnstein-Prütwitz, bei Sir Ambrose Hampden, Stanten Court, Ayrs-

dale, Cheshire, Holland—Dover." He looked up at her, smiling, puzzled. "All that way, *Mädel?*"

"Yes."

"To England?"

They were all listening now. They had even stopped eating, with their *Butterbrötchen* halfway to their mouths, and in a minute that queer, withdrawn look would come into their faces. It was a terrible thing to be very small and belong to a family of heroes who were never afraid.

"Yes."

"Have you people there?"

And then suddenly, before she knew what she was doing, she had said in a high, squeaky voice, "My mother was English."

"Ah!—I see."

The stout man nodded and sat back. Every one went on eating. Trüdchen knew just what they felt. It was like that in class when some one had done or said something wrong. One was ashamed for them in one's very bones.

Of course, it was just chance that a few minutes later, when they slid into a big station, every one should begin to gather up their possessions. They lumbered out into the dark one after another. They didn't look at Trüdchen—except the stout man, who turned back and patted her on the shoulder.

"Poor little Fräulein," he said.

Of course—just chance. And yet it was as though they were getting up and leaving her because they couldn't bear it. Without them the carriage grew

cold and filled with shadows. The whole train seemed to have died, and the guard's voice coming down the corridor had a terrifying, hollow sound.

"Passports—get your passports ready, please."

He peered in. She was so small—so blotted out in her corner—that he had to look twice before he saw her.

"I get off here. It's the French frontier. Good luck, Fräulein."

*"Danke,"* she said. *"Danke schön."*

He couldn't help laughing. She was such a prim, composed little thing.

The door slammed. The train jerked forward, throwing out a long, melancholy whistle into the darkness. In a moment they would have passed over that mysterious line. Fräulein von Arnstein-Prütwitz scrambled down from her seat. She flung herself against the closed door. All the brave ancestors were forgotten. She fought with the stiff handle that wouldn't yield.

"Oh, please—please let me out—let me go home!"

She didn't know what home meant.

A French official opened the door. He stared down at her. She looked queer enough in the dingy half-light—a comic child's figure with a crêpe hat over one ear and a dead-white face and round eyes behind round spectacles.

"Passports, please."

She gave him hers. He looked at it, comparing the photograph with the original. Ugly little Ger-

man brat! He gave it back to her with a malicious ceremonious touch to his képi.

*"Merci, Madamoiselle."*

She stood there in the middle of the carriage, very still, very upright, swallowing her gasps.

At least, she was glad that she hadn't really cried.

## V

Monsieur Jules Leforges, member of the French Senate, got in at the next station. He had no idea that anything particular was going to happen to him. He arranged his traps, spread his overcoat over his knees, and folded his gloved hands over his newspaper with the air of an experienced traveller settling himself down to a comfortable journey. At first sight he looked an easy-going, genial gentleman, rather stout, with a full, grey-bearded face and sparkling blue eyes, deep-set. But at second sight one wasn't so sure. The broad shoulders were held aggressively, the mouth was tightly closed, and the eyes had a harsh, fierce stare in them even when he smiled One plump hand was a neat replica of its companion, except that it wasn't flexible. It wasn't real.

Monsieur Leforges glanced round him, as a traveller will, to see who his fellow travellers are and whether they are likely to annoy him. He saw a little girl in the far corner by the window. He saw her, but he really couldn't be said to have noticed her. She passed in and out of his vision without

reaching his consciousness, as it were. She was too small.

As to Trüdchen, she didn't see him at all. She was sitting bolt upright, with her hands clasped in her lap, staring intently at nothing.

So they chanced on each other.

Monsieur Leforges' secretary, a bright, smooth young man, glanced at her, too, and glanced away again. He liked children—particularly little girls—but he didn't care for this one. She was quite unattractive, almost half-witted looking. He smiled across at his employer, of whom he stood in some awe.

"Looks as though we might have the carriage to ourselves," he said. "A good ending to a good day, Monsieur."

Monsieur Leforges nodded. He settled his big shoulders more comfortably in their corner and made a little, growling, satisfied noise in his throat. Oh, yes, it had been a good day, a satisfying day. He saw again, in his mind's eye, that afternoon's scene in the *Rathaus*. He could congratulate himself. As the representative of the Republic he had behaved with dignity and restraint. No venom, no anger, none of your blustering, brutal Prussianism. He had shown them how a Frenchman behaves to a beaten enemy. He ran his tongue over his lips, as though he were remembering a delicious wine. How the leader of the deputation—little, mean rat of a fellow—had winced and cringed under his remorseless suavity!

"You ask for milk for your children, *Messieurs.* My little son was at Rouse during your occupation. There was no milk for French children there. And so my son died. As to your invalids, I myself was prisoner for two years in one of your camps. They amputated my arm there—without anæsthetics. It appears there was some temporary shortage, and your own people came first. Naturally. *Chacun à son tour, Messieurs.*"

And they had withered away before him, cringing, beaten, with hollow, aghast eyes. And he had made them a little bow, perfectly courteous.

Oh, yes, that had done him good. It was like a feast after a long hunger. During those endless years of horror he had dreamed of just such a scene, rehearsing it over and over again, adding a touch here and there. As a Frenchman one had to observe the decencies. One was civilised. One used the rapier. One made elegant gestures. But one killed all the same.

Yes, very satisfying. He sighed and shifted his position. But it was like a feast that never satisfied you. You got up from the table with a kind of rage—a more terrible rage each time, so that it was difficult to restrain yourself. You saw red—you wanted to take some one by the throat. He knew that it was bad for him. It was bad for any one to be constantly frustrated. What he really wanted was to be at peace—to live in the country quietly with his wife—to keep chickens—to be a bluff and kindly fellow, loved by every one. But he couldn't go.

Not until he was satisfied. It was the War. The Germans. The swine——

"The swine!" he said aloud.

His secretary leaned toward him with a little, deprecating gesture of understanding. "That's what they are—" he said, "swine!"

Monsieur Leforges threw back his head. He talked rather loudly and emphatically, as though he were addressing a public meeting:

"There must be no sentimentalism," he said. "Sentimentalists are more dangerous than scoundrels. They knock a murderer down, and then they help him up again so that he can murder some one else. We are at least a logical people. We know what the Germans are—we have experienced them in our flesh. Any man who has seen what I have seen——!"

He gave an exclamation, bitter and ironic. There was no need to convince his secretary, and yet he felt himself driven by an odd necessity to convince some one.

"Look what they have done!" he said. He threw out his hand. With swift, dramatic sentences he painted a world in ruins. He had his race's gift for self-expression, and one saw the red horror of it all —the torture, the bestiality, the grey misery. "Let them died," he said. "Let the children die. They are a bad people. They are like rats. They breed like rats. If I find a baby rat in my house, I don't wait for it to grow up. I stamp on it."

He nodded and looked about him, strong and con-

vinced. But there was only one other person in the carriage besides the secretary—the little girl with the absurd crêpe hat over one ear, and the black-gloved hands, and the dangling, black legs. She was looking at him, too. It was oddly disconcerting. Her eyes behind the round glasses stared as though they were looking beyond him to something else—something terrifying. Well, that was natural. He had forgotten her. He had said things unfit for a child's ears. He shrugged his shoulders in the loose-fitting overcoat, and cleared his throat, and felt for his cigar case. Then a whimsical kindliness overcame him. After all, even a plain child was a child. He bent toward her gallantly, as though she had been a grown woman.

*"Vous permettez, Mademoiselle?"*

She started violently. *"Ich verstehe nicht."*

He sat back, frowning. German—a German little girl.

"Ah, you don't understand French?"

*"Mais—mais, oui, Monsieur."*

She continued to stare at him. Was the child an imbecile, he wondered angrily. For he was very angry—bitterly, absurdly angry. He made a sound that was meant for a laugh, and grimaced at his companion with a rudeness that he had been careful not to show to that deputation. Then he lit his cigar and smoked in silence. He went on with his thoughts. But they had lost their clarity. It was as though some one had rudely interrupted him.

Besides, he was tired. It had been a satisfying but a hard day. He composed himself to sleep.

But he couldn't sleep either. Each time he opened his eyes, there was the little girl in her dim corner, like a black image of an unutterable sorrow, staring at him.

## VI

The train drew alongside the quay at midnight, and instantly the sleeping carriages burst into a distracted activity. The passengers leaned out of the windows and supplicated the porters, and the porters stormed along the corridors, banging the luggage against the sides and not caring in the least. Trüdchen had never seen a confusion like that. A big man in a blue-green blouse seized her *Handgepäck* from her and yelled a number which she didn't hear. She was quite sure that her little bag was lost forever. Nothing would ever find itself again.

It was raining. The long, slanting lines shone in the lamplight. The platform gleamed blackly. Men pushing great trolleys or staggering under impossible loads lurched in and out of the dripping darkness like lost souls. Every one looked pale and tired and irritable. The air was bitter and sticky with a strange scent. Trüdchen had never smelled the sea before. It frightened her. It lay outside her there in the night like a wild beast, waiting.

People eddied fretfully. Nobody saw the little

girl in black—or if they did, they did not think about her. Of course, she belonged to somebody. They jostled her and carried her along like a piece of driftwood, to the passport barrier. Every one showed his passport. It was just a friendly formality. But when Trüdchen came, the official grew more official. He read her name out, and compared it with a list, and looked at her hard, as though he were making up his mind to remember her next time. The people behind fidgeted. Every one saw that she was different.

"A baby rat!" That was what the big Frenchman had said. You put your foot on it, and the little bones went crunch-crunch. She began to shake all over. It was very cold. And she had always been so frightened of rats. This great barn-like place might be full of them. She was a baby rat herself—black, scurrying, terrified, amid all these big people who hated her. And at any moment one of them might——

She slipped out of the shed on to the open quay. A wet wind swept across its terrifying emptiness and nearly blew her off her feet. She saw the sinister gleam of water, and lights that swung with a wicked magic in the black air. A ship loomed over her. She didn't think of it as a ship. It was a live thing full of bright eyes that stared malevolently. She hustled up a narrow plank into its very jaws. She didn't know where to go. The people round her seemed to be growing bigger and bigger. They were trampling on her. She beat against

them with her hands, saying, "Oh, please—please——" trying to escape. They looked down at her, half impatient. They thought she was lost and looking for some one. But there was no one for her to look for.

Then she was quite alone in the dark. She couldn't escape. A barrier high as her head stopped her short, and underneath she could hear something talking to her very softly. She couldn't quite hear what it said, but she felt that if she listened very hard, she would understand, and she didn't want to. She put her hands to her ears and crouched down on a coil of rope, hiding.

Gradually the tumult died down. The passengers had gone to their quarters. The gangways were being withdrawn. The great ship shook itself and began to churn the water into foam. The gurgling intermittent whisper stopped and then became a hiss. They were moving. Trüdchen sat up and saw the dock lights slide away behind them. It was almost as though the land had been her home. Something inside her was being torn out.

Her teeth chattered. But she wasn't crying. Crying wouldn't ward off the horror that was creeping all around her, closer and closer. She could hear its soft, fluttering footfalls. Its myriad soft, black bodies whisked against her—rats—big rats—baby rats. Why, her father must have been a rat—a huge, horrible creature that did horrible things until at last some one had stamped on him, too. He had seemed so splendid—she had been so proud of him.

Often the thought of his wonderfulness had kept her brave when she had been cold and hungry. But perhaps rats were like that. Perhaps they were proud of themselves and of each other. They didn't know how every one hated them or why—they didn't see they were different. Frau Hildebrandt and the Frau Bäckerin—they seemed like every one else—ordinary people. But you couldn't tell—you thought you were just ordinary, yourself. But you weren't—every one else knew. And they said it would have been better if you hadn't been born, so that you wouldn't grow up. They wanted to put their foot on you and crunch the life out of you, they hated you so.

The rats had hated her mother. They had hated her. There wasn't anywhere in the world where you could go—to escape——

She stood up. The ship lurched and flung her heavily against the bulwarks. She could hear the water talking to her underneath. The foam was like a white woman gliding alongside and beckoning. Perhaps her mother——

Her father and mother were dead. They were safe. When you were dead, people didn't worry about you any more. They let you go. She remembered a mouse they had killed in their house once. Her father's *Bursche* had trapped it in the kitchen, and every one had screamed at the poor thing, trembling and shrinking in its corner, and said, "How disgusting—how filthy!" But when it was dead—all limp and quiet and not afraid any more—they

had just picked it up and put it in the dustbin and forgotten it.

It was easy to be dead. Death was just round the corner. There was little Franz Schumacher, her classmate, who had thrown himself out of the window because he couldn't do his lessons. His teachers had been so cross and cruel to him. But afterward they were sorry. They saw how unhappy he had been. They sent wreaths to his funeral.

The small rain had soaked the crêpe hat through and through, so that it hung comically about her ears. It soaked through the thin coat to her little, starving bones. But she didn't know. She didn't even know that she was thinking vast, terrible thoughts about life and death, or that she, Gertrude auf und zu und von Arnstein-Prütwitz, was trying to find a way out from men's hatred of one another.

## VII

The crossing from the Hook to Southampton is an all-night affair, and Monsieur Leforges went straight down to his cabin. He was very tired. But before he had taken off his overcoat, he knew that he would not be able to sleep. It had been a wonderful day. But it often happened that after he had been peculiarly successful, he would toss the whole night through. Nerves, of course. It was high time he retired. Only a sense of duty kept him going. The war had deprived men of their youth and their old age, too.

"I shall go for a stroll on deck," he told his secretary, who intruded a sleek head to inquire after his well-being. "The fresh air will quiet me down."

The deck was deserted. The wind swept it with an invisible broom. You could see the water scudding before it. The ship pitched heavily, and the stern lights rose and fell like the tail of a seesaw. Monsieur Leforges was an old sea-dog. He liked a storm—a fight. But to-night he was too tired. He would have been glad of a little quiet.

He pulled his cap well down, dug his hands into his pockets. He had plenty to occupy his mind—there was the meeting with an English Cabinet Minister to-morrow, and the task of telling that gentleman in the suavest possible manner that he was a sentimentalist and a fool. An amusing, satisfying task well suited to Monsieur Leforges' temper. But instead he thought about his little dead son.

There wasn't anything new in that. He was always thinking about him, but in terms of a glacial, relentless passion. He wore his memory like a hair-shirt that exasperated him to fresh energy. But to-night he thought of him as himself—as the little boy he had known. He wondered what he had looked like before the end. He must have had a small, sunken, white face and round, staring eyes. He must have looked at his captors and tyrants with just that expression of bewilderment and grief—not angry, but with the tragic resignation of childhood. And his captors had rattled their sabers and

thought, "Starve and be damned to you, little French swine!"

Monsieur Leforges walked up and down, up and down. He seemed to himself utterly alone on a phantom-ship steaming to an unknown destination. A wonderful day—the culmination of all his ambition. But his heart was tired—dead tired.

What had become of her—of that little girl? How she had stared at him from her dim corner! He had seen her once since then—standing on the quay, blown about by the wind and the rain like a stray wisp of unregarded life—so utterly forlorn. He had nearly spoken to her. But not quite.

Of course, she hadn't understood a word. It wasn't likely. He had talked fast and angrily. Not a clever child either—half-witted, probably, with those round, unflinching eyes that hadn't seemed to see him at all. And yet there had been a look of rather awful understanding. Well, what did it matter? He had spoken the truth.

How old was she? She was so stunted looking you couldn't tell. Eight or ten, perhaps. She and Robert might have played together. They might have played the same games with the same toys. Children did—all over the world. There was a sort of understanding between children. Later on, something happened to them.

He stood still, staring down at the black, rolling water. He was more than tired. He was unhappy. He knew now that he was a desperately unhappy man. It seemed to him that his heart lay like an

aching stone in his breast. Other people lost their children. They grew resigned. Their memories were golden and lovely. His had turned to poison. They were slowly killing him.

Oh, Robert—little Robert——

Bitter tears came into his eyes. He turned away, ashamed, and walked on. He had passed beyond the shelter of the upper deck and was battling against the full force of the wind when he saw her——

At first, he didn't believe. It was a shadow—an hallucination—a phantom among the phantoms of his brain. But his breath had stopped. Then he knew—knew with a horror of certainty that choked the cry in his throat. He was like a man in a nightmare. It seemed that whole minutes elapsed before he began to run. And then his feet were leaden. They stumbled and slipped. The wind pushed him back with invisible hands. It caught his voice and flung it behind him. All the time he could see her. She was climbing slowly, painfully. She might have been trying to climb over a stile. There was something so simple and innocent about her movements. Only the sea and the wind and the tossing ship were sinister. Now she was standing almost upright—like a small, fantastic figurehead against the flying darkness. She seemed to be looking intently at something far beneath her. Her glasses dropped off—he saw them fall—then her little hands went up, covering her eyes.

He never knew whether she heard him shout. He

reached her. He caught the short, dripping skirt. He dragged her back, and she fell against him. A ship's lantern threw its ghostly light into their two faces, as they stared aghast at one another. For that moment they were not man and child, but two equals, considering the whole grief and pitifulness of existence.

Her hands were pressed against his chest. She said, simply, with an odd dignity, "Please—let me go——"

But he held her closer to him. He felt as though he were fighting her. He spoke in German—hardly knowing that he did so.

"Poor little girl—*armes kleins Mädchen*——"

Her arms dropped. Something seemed to break in her. He could almost hear it—like the snapping of a taut wire. The next instant she was clinging to him. The little, terrible hands groped and clutched at him as though they were seeking his very heart. And she cried. He had never dreamed that a child could cry like that. He thought her whole body must be torn asunder. And Monsieur Leforges cried, too. His own heart melted in an answering anguish.

"Don't—don't—there, it's all right now. God forgive us all——"

He sat down on the dripping coil of rope. He drew her close to him under the shelter of his coat. He kissed her. All the German tendernesses he had ever heard of came to his stiff lips. He could feel how she grew quiet—listening. She was like a little bird, warming its half-dead body against his.

"Tell me—why did you—how could you—you poor baby——"

They had forgotten the wind and the rain. They were like two lovers. They clung together. They were quite alone. For a while they were silent, and then very slowly and haltingly Fräulein Gertrude von Arnstein-Prütwitz opened her heart to Monsieur Jules Leforges.

She told him about the rats—the baby rats.

And Monsieur Leforges stared into the darkness and grieved over himself and the whole world.

## VIII

Among those who waited on the station platform was a tall, grey-haired man—military in type—who looked as though the Continental train, then curling round the bend, was bringing him no happiness. He, too, was thinking of his dead son and of Gertrude auf und zu und von Arnstein-Prütwitz. He was hating her. It seemed to him an ironic insult to his grief that he should have to bring into his home a child bearing that name.

But as the great train drew to a standstill, he squared his shoulders. After all, he had made up his mind. It was his duty. He had to go through with it. He wouldn't show what he felt. Anyhow, she would be in the hands of governesses—you couldn't send a child with that name to school—not yet. He himself would go abroad.

There were few passengers. No children. He

stood looking about him perplexedly. A square-built foreigner stared at him and then lifted his cap. He spoke in careful English.

"Are you, by any chance, Sir Ambrose Hampden?"

The tall man bowed.

"You are awaiting your grandchild?" the Frenchman persisted.

Sir Ambrose flinched. He had never thought of Gertrude von Arnstein-Prütwitz as a grandchild. He nodded. "She doesn't seem to be here," he said coldly.

"She is here—in my charge. But first, I want a word with you."

It was all very peremptory and astonishing. But there was something about this Frenchman—something rather desperate, as though the man didn't care what happened so long as he did what he had to do. The two strangers walked up and down the platform. The Frenchman talked rapidly with a rare but expressive gesture. The English Cabinet Minister was waiting for him. That didn't matter. And then, all at once, both men stood still, facing each other. The Englishman had not so much as lifted a hand. But he had said, "Good God!" and Monsieur Leforges drew a long breath of relief.

"So you see why I had to speak to you first. After all—I have lost my son, too. But if you do not want her—say so. She shall be in his place. I can not bear any more unhappy children."

Sir Ambrose Hampden blinked his grey lashes. "Better go and pick her up, hadn't we?" he said.

They found her sleeping in her corner. What had he expected? Some monster of insolent hideousness? He hardly knew. At least, not this little, black, crumpled heap of broken-hearted weariness. Her hat—what was left of it—lay on the seat beside her. Her head drooped. Not beautiful in any way, but with a kind of dignity—the dignity of much sorrow. He bent over her and touched her gently. Her eyes opened. They looked at him short-sightedly, and he saw that they were his daughter's eyes—his son's eyes. His own face broke like a mask. He laid his big hand on her starved one.

"Trüdchen——" he said. "—so you've come home at last!"

## VII

## *The Perfect Marriage*

### I

THE disaster shook River's-End to its depths. This might be thought impossible since River's-End had apparently no particular depths to shake—indeed would have repudiated such a possession as being not altogether respectable. River's-End believed in its calm and pleasant surface. Sometimes the surface was agreeably rippled, but only by little, agreeable things. Somebody's daughter was engaged to somebody's son. Or they were married. Or the Mordaunt-Smiths had sold their old car and bought a new one. There was not even any scandal. For to have imputed scandalous actions to any member of the community would have been to cast a slur over the community itself. Instead there were tennis tournaments and dances and the solemn matter of one's golf handicap.

River's-End was a cluster of large, red-brick houses on a tree-clad height overlooking a pretty tributary of the Are. Though they were red-brick and new, the houses were not vulgar. They were in the best taste, and the word "cluster" does them an injustice. It suggests a proximity altogether too

warm. As a matter of fact they were separated and almost hidden from one another by shady gardens, each with its own tennis lawn and rose-covered pergola. On the other side of the Heights, deep down in the valley out of sight of the river, was Tatbury —a squalidly prosperous mining town, whose smoke, when the wind was to the east, drifted horridly over River's-End and would have spoiled the white frocks of the tennis players but for the fact that it always rained when the wind was in the east and River's-End was therefore indoors with closed windows. At other times River's-End did not know that Tatbury existed.

Some of the River's-End males went up to business every day, but most of them had retired young. There were no really old people, and nobody was ever very ill—or indeed very anything at all. You could not associate either heart-break or ecstasy with River's-End.

Then Harry Franklin was killed. Not in River's-End, of course. Somewhere out in the wilds of Armenia where he had gone on business. By Turks. Something altogether violent and incredible.

## II

Mrs. Eliot and Mrs. Frances talked of it as they walked up the hill together from the station. They had been up to town, shopping, and they had met accidentally. Usually, when they met, they talked about clothes or their children or—in intellectual

moments—of the latest novel. But now they could think of nothing else but the Franklins. They did not know the Franklins very well. Nobody did, though everybody knew them. They were like "Ravello," their home, the one white house shining with a subdued radiance amidst the stolid red-brick —aloof, different, and very beautiful. Yet it seemed that after all they had meant something to River's-End.

The two women spoke in undertones. Perhaps it was the summer's dusk which lent their comfortable, round bodies dignity—a poignancy to their voices.

"Poor soul! Poor soul!"

"She must be quite young still. Forty, I suppose. Though she doesn't look it. Quite absurdly girlish, I used to think."

"And so pretty—like a flower—a dark, foreign flower—or a bird."

Mrs. Frances smiled. Every one knew that little Mrs. Eliot was romantical—high-flown. It was always breaking out of her in irrepressible spurts.

"Of course, distinctly pretty."

"So long to live alone."

"I don't know. People who've lived together like that—I've noticed—they seem to break up."

"You mean——? Oh, dear, it's terrible. I haven't been able to think of anything else. She haunts me. I've been trying to imagine what it feels like to lose some one whom one has loved—like that."

"It's a mistake to care too much—almost wrong."

"But rather wonderful, too, don't you think? So perfect."

"They didn't care for any one else. At first we were all rather upset—it seemed so unneighbourly. But then we saw they didn't mean anything unkind. Not that they weren't good about charities—lending their garden and that sort of thing—but one always knew that they were glad when it was over."

"Like young lovers."

"It was pretty to watch them."

"Do you know—we were only acquaintances; none of us was more than that to them—but I used to think of them quite a lot. Sometimes when I was depressed about something—stupidly depressed, because James is a perfect dear and the children are the best children in the world—I used to look across at Ravello, and it cheered me—just to think that there were people like that—perfect people—so perfectly happy in each other. It sort of made things worth while again. After all, it could happen, even in this world, to some of us. Don't you understand?"

The hill had grown rather steep. Mrs. Frances was breathing heavily. "In a way, my dear—of course."

It was almost as though Mrs. Eliot and Mrs. Frances had opened their hearts to each other, and that hearts, even in River's-End, were strange places.

III

While the two women climbed the hill, Joan Franklin was standing by the long window that looked down over the river. The river, where she and Harry had bathed every morning, year in, year out, lay under a pall of white mist. She could trace the shadowy garden path down which they had run together. She could see him running just in front of her, tall and slender and vigorous as a Greek athlete. Sometimes he would take a flying leap over a flower-bed, just out of pure bodily well-being. The next instant there would be a header into the ice-cold water—a clean-cut, beautiful dive made without a pause. Then she came—not hesitating either, but with a tensing of the muscles and a quick catch of the breath—and they would race each other against the stream.

People stared when they heard of these exploits on some biting winter's day. They shuddered and groaned in vicarious suffering, and Harry smiled his cool, illusive smile. He was a Spartan. His body was his disciplined servant, the instrument of his wonderful mind, to be kept keen and supple.

And now—— Somewhere in the world it had been broken. It served him no longer.

Behind her was twilight and the exquisite scent of dying flowers. On a table lay yesterday's telegram. Nobody had dared to touch it. It lay there like a venomous thing, twisted even now with a grotesque, immobile life, poised to strike. But oddly enough,

when a breath of wind stirred it, one saw that its fangs were drawn and that it was dead, too.

The room was their library. Harry had loved it best. Into its stately dimensions they had brought their greatest treasures. It was rich with oak—mellow Elizabethan oak that shone with an unquenchable virility, chill, grey Gothic from which the living flesh had long since fallen, leaving a noble skeleton. Each piece was a museum piece. Each had been tracked down, sometimes over the length and breadth of England. They had been like hunters, patient and untiring. Harry had never been prouder than that day when they had brought home the Tudor chest that stood close to the window. She remembered how he had teased her, in a mood of almost boyish light-heartedness, saying he loved her only because her dark, fragile loveliness set off old English oak so perfectly.

How serene and exquisite their life had been! Not idle, but vigorous, well spent. (It was terrible how calmly she could think of it.) Every morning after they had glanced over the papers—a perfunctory glance, for had they not said laughingly to each other that they were like two people on an island paradise to whom the noisy sea meant nothing?—they had given themselves to the real work of the day. Catalogues, price lists, notices of sales, books of reference were spread out in orderly disorder down the refectory table. For it was not only oak that Harry loved. He had the most valuable stamp-collection in England. It had been begun in his

boyhood, and it was typical of him that he had become an expert, so subtle that he could tell a forgery blindfolded, by the very touch. He had taught her all that she could learn, but he had instinct for rightness beyond learning.

In the afternoon they had ridden together along the crest of the pine-clad hills. She could see him now like a vision against the dusk, long-limbed and gracefully at ease on his golden chestnut; the sun had shone down on them both between the red-brown tree stems, clothing horse and rider with a sort of radiance. And at the end of a hard gallop he would turn to look at her—she shut her eyes now, feeling the old fire burn terribly in her veins—not appraisingly, but worshippingly as at some perfect creation of the gods, and had smiled, his own handsome face alight. And she had looked back, not smiling, but subdued by the wonder of their unchanging love for each other.

At night he read aloud to her. He had a rich voice, manly in its metal, and read well, and his choice of reading was the very expression of himself. All that was nobly and rarely thought he made his own. He shrank from ugliness.

Nothing ugly had ever touched their lives. Not from the hour of their first wonderful meeting, when he had broken upon her girlhood like romance itself out of a dream, with panache and knightly splendor, through their courtship and union in that Italian palace of which this home was the remembrance, to the hour of their first and final separation.

Even the years seemed to have passed them by unharmed. They had kept their golden youthfulness. He had been forty-five when he had left her, and he had had a boy's clear glance and clean skin and gallant joyousness with his man's dignity. And he had been proud that she was still a fragile girl, delicate and unsoiled, calm-eyed, knowing no harm. Indeed no harm had come near her. His austere passion had burned about her, guarding her like some happier Brünhilde on their enchanted isle.

And then that letter. Business. He had never had anything to do with business. His people had been rich for generations. Now somewhere out in the wilds a source of wealth was threatened. It seemed he had to go. She had seen his face shadowed with distaste, weariness—almost with disgust.

"Why should one have to do these things?" he had asked.

She had wanted to go with him, but there his fastidiousness had revolted. It would be a rough trip at best, and the thought of her exquisite delicacy pitted against dirt and discomfort had made him relentless. And in three months he would be home again.

They had said good-bye to each other, not in the turmoil and torturing constraint of a station, but in their garden under the pale shadow of an almond tree, flushed with an early spring. They had clung to each other like young lovers.

"Nothing shall change," she had whispered. "Every hour you will know what I am doing. I shall carry on our life together until you come."

Even their parting had been perfect. Nothing to be regretted. Nothing left unsaid, or said too much. Without clamour they had laid bare their hearts to each other . . .

She closed the window against that cold, grey mist. And, closing it, the house became a tomb. She went slowly like a sleep-walker to the mantel shelf and lit the candles in the branched sconce (for they had justly condemned electricity in such a setting). The steady, golden light awoke shadows. So easy to see him sitting there. She took the book from which he had read to her that last night. The marker lay in its place like a finger of finality.

"Peace—peace—he is not dead, he doth not sleep. "He hath awakened from the dream of life."

She read on steadily to the end—as he would have done, as he would have wished her to do. The high oak chair held her upright in an austere hand. She did not cry, though her heart lay stunned and bleeding in her breast. She knew that the first tear would let loose a storm whose havoc she dared not contemplate, whose violence would be an insult to the dignity of their loving.

IV

River's-End understood. It would have been more typical of them if they had condemned, but for these two lovers they had always displayed an unexpected delicacy of perception. As Mrs. Eliot

said, "It wouldn't be our way, of course, but then they were always different." And she said it with an odd humility.

So from a respectful distance River's-End watched Joan Franklin carry on the pattern of her life. Early in the morning she ran down alone to the river's edge and plunged in as gallantly as though he watched her, and swam against the stream, listening with closed eyes to the strong, clean stroke of an unseen swimmer. After breakfast she glanced through the papers—an almost unseeing glance, for the world was further off than it had ever been. Then came their work. There were the stamps that he had left unclassified. He had been very proud of his stamps. There were seven volumes of them in a specially constructed case. Like the Elizabethan oak, they would come one day to a museum. For there was no one to inherit. Some of the River's-End people—the unmarried ones chiefly—thought the Franklins' childlessness must be a great sorrow to them, but they themselves had never felt it as such. Perhaps at the bottom of their hearts was a secret thankfulness that no one had ever come between them.

In the afternoon she rode his mare Rosita along the river heights, and at night she read. She read over and over again the things that he had loved best. She did not want to read anything else. She stood still where her guide had left her looking back over the road along which they had traveled.

She wore no mourning, but dressed with the old,

elegant simplicity. Sometimes in the evening from an upper window Mrs. Eliot saw her wandering like a pale ghost in her haunted garden. And Mrs. Eliot with her perfectly dear James and her five children wept a little for her and said, "Poor soul! Poor soul!" under her breath and in a note of wondering envy of people who could love so much.

And thus a year passed.

## V

At the corner where the road dipped, suddenly Rosita bolted. Perhaps something startled her; perhaps she knew that her rider's hand was listless on the bridle. She went blindly headlong, like a mad thing, and Mrs. Franklin, wakened to the realisation of her danger but not to fear, could hardly keep her to the road. She and Harry had never been farther than the corner, because Harry had said that beyond that point the road became bad and uninteresting. But now Rosita had chosen for herself.

Mrs. Franklin was a good rider. Harry had taught her. In other days she would have mastered the runaway in a few hundred yards. Now she had no strength, no will. In the very midst of that downward, thunderous rush she realised quite calmly that she didn't care—that if anything, she was glad. Change was coming. Death itself, perhaps. And she didn't want to live any more. Not without Harry. It had been very beautiful, her

daily, solemn service at the tomb of their common life together, but her heart had been broken. And now fate was setting her free.

The soft River's-End road, strewn with pine needles, became a rough cart track. The trees thinned to hedges that streamed past her like great, grey-green rags in the wind. Familiar landmarks were left behind. To her excited fancy she was rushing into the shadow of a black tunnel that was to bring her to the new life.

Rosita stumbled—recovered desperately. At the bottom of the mill a stirrup leather broke. Mrs. Franklin made no effort. She knew a brief pain that went out instantly like a torch flame in water—a silence and emptiness that endured centuries. Then light came back, slowly and heavily—a grey, sunless light that tasted acrid.

She stood up. She was so little conscious of her body that she really believed she was dead and waiting in some bleak limbo for Harry who came even now to meet her. Then, in bitter reaction, she almost laughed.

The man had stopped a few paces from her.

"Hurt?" he asked.

She shook her head.

"Your horse bolted past me. I thought some damage might have been done." He looked her up and down, curiously and dispassionately. "Good thing you landed on that nettle bed," he added.

She forced her voice to steadiness. "If you wouldn't mind going after my horse for me——"

"I've something better to do."

It was not said rudely. It was a mere statement of fact. She stared at him incredulously.

"But surely, if I'm hurt——"

"You said you weren't hurt. Your face is bleeding a little. There are worse things than that. Anyhow, I shouldn't galavant after runaway horses."

She saw that he was not a gentleman. Nor was he a workingman. Nor a tradesman. He was tall and heavy-limbed and wore a suit of ill-fitting reach-me-downs. But there was an air of aggressive independence about him. His hard, blue eyes met hers unflinchingly, and the plain ruggedness of his face was lit with the flicker of an ironic smile.

She turned and walked on. Her side hurt her. She was sick with astonishment and pain. She was angry, too—as she had never been angry in her life—and the ugliness of the emotion horrified her. There was only one thing that she wanted—to get away from this man with his brutal indifference so that he should not see that she was on the point of tears.

He called after her. "Where are you going?"

"After my horse," she returned gallantly.

"Well, you'd better not go that way. There's trouble down there."

That almost amused her. Trouble! She nearly called back, "My husband—Harry—was killed last year," but she knew that she was light-headed still, and set her teeth.

He made no attempt to follow. When she

glanced back a moment later, he had disappeared, and she felt herself go under in a wave of utter forlornness. She longed for the dead lover as she had never longed for him before—to defend and comfort her—and he had never seemed so far away. In that mystic life amidst the gracious beauty of their home it had been easy to conjure him back. He walked with her in the garden, read with her, thought with her. She had shown him her loveliest rose implicitly confident in his nearness. But now it was as though she had been thrust out of paradise into an alien country where he could not follow.

She stumbled on over the rut-seamed road, catching her breath in sobs. The hedges that straggled miserably beside her, untrimmed and black with grime, degenerated to a tangled, stunted growth that fringed unwholesome vegetable patches and a ditch littered with cans and evil-smelling refuse. The road still sloped downward. In the hollow Mrs. Franklin could see chimneystacks rearing like black, smoldering torches above a clutter of mean houses. From their smoke there dripped a dirty moisture. A fitful wind blew the grit and darkness of it all against her face. Up at River's-End the sun had been shining, but here it rained—perhaps it always rained. The cobbles and broken pavement which petered out by the last house shone with a leprous moisture, and a squalid stream ran in the ill-made gutter.

Of course Mrs. Franklin knew that there were places like this, because on their treasure-hunting

trips Harry had always taken such care to avoid them. He hated ugliness. He had always shielded her from ugliness as from contamination. But now he had gone, and Mrs. Franklin could not escape. She was down in the midst of it, on foot, forsaken, helpless. A kind of anger gathered under her distress—a resentment. Such places ought not to be allowed—not near to one like that. It was strange that Harry should have known of all this and not protested—or perhaps he hadn't known.

She had meant to ask for help. She had had an idea of going into the first cottage and sitting by a friendly kitchen fire while a respectable workingman went in search of Rosita. A group of women, shawls over their heads, stood in an open doorway. They were looking down the street as though they were expecting something to happen. When they saw Mrs. Franklin, their stare became blank—hostile. They watched her pass—an exotic, slender figure in her dirt-stained riding clothes with the blood still wet on her cheek—and she could feel their silence poised behind her like a clenched fist.

She dared not speak to them.

A company of mounted police clattered out of a side street. Then an ambulance. The women came suddenly to life. They began to run. One of the police tried to turn them back, shouting at them, but they were inexorable. They brushed Mrs. Franklin on one side as though they did not see her. She had never been frightened before. She was frightened now. She ran into the passage of the

next cottage. The door was closed. Without waiting she pushed it open.

Then she stopped short. She did not know whether she or some one else had cried out. By the yellow light that filtered through a cracked window-pane she saw at first one thing and one thing only. That it was a woman who faced her from the opposite doorway she hardly realised. Women weren't like that in Mrs. Franklin's world. Even the servants had a sort of dignity. This woman's very immobility was violent—menacing. She loomed out of the dusk like a trapped animal. She was half-naked. It seemed that she had tried to dress and then in frantic haste had torn a frowsy sheet from the bed that filled the room behind her with its tumbled outline, and wrapped it about her. The squalor of it all seemed to rush out at Mrs. Franklin like a foul breath.

The woman stared back, open-mouthed, with fixed, wild eyes. No one could have told how old she was. There was youth lurking still in the round face, but her body was heavy, shapeless, and the dark hair that hung about her shoulders gave her a look of madness and ageless suffering. She groaned and swayed where she stood, muttering, "Oh, Gawd —my man—my man——"

Mrs. Franklin choked down her nausea. Behind her a muffled roar of voices surged nearer. She closed the door sharply. "I'm sorry—my—my horse bolted. I came in here—hoping——"

The woman lurched forward, clinging to the table.

"Wot 'ave they done at 'im? Oh, Gawd, them cursed strikes. 'E would go—got to stick by 'is pals, 'e said—— They don't think of us——" She steadied herself. "You tell me—I got to know wot they done at 'em—— I'll go mad—lying there—not knowing——"

"I don't know——" Mrs. Franklin's voice sounded shrill and out of control. "I don't know anything—my horse bolted——"

She was stopped by a sense of utter futility. Of course the woman couldn't understand. She wasn't even listening. She whimpered, "My man—my man"—her red, rough hand pressed between her breasts, her gaze fixed beyond Mrs. Franklin as though any moment the door might open in answer to her. Mrs. Franklin turned to escape, but there was shouting in the street, the steely clang of hoofs on the cobbles. She felt trapped, outraged, indignant. It was horrible to be so frightened—so helpless.

"My man—my man——"

It got on her nerves. It was indecent—this animal crying out. These people were animals—ugly animals. She would never be able to forget them. It would be an ugly stain on her memory. Somehow they stood between her and Harry, so that she couldn't see him.

"For God's sake——"

The woman had cried out—screamed. It was a scream torn from the throat. It turned the blood cold. She had crumpled to her knees, clinging with

convulsed fingers to the table edge, her body cowed and twisted as though under some invisible lash.

"I—I'm afraid you're ill. I'll get some one."

Mrs. Franklin said it with her lips—mechanically. It was the thing she had to say, because she was a civilised human being. But she knew that once she got outside this room she would never come back. She would run—run as from a nightmare. Then, as she half turned, the woman lifted her head and looked at her queerly—as though she understood, almost with pity.

"It's my time come, lady—my time—that's wot it is."

"I'll get some one."

"There ain't no one, lady. They've gone to the pit's 'ead—to their men."

She lay still, an inert heap on the stone floor. Mrs. Franklin ran to her. She half lifted her, half dragged her into the adjoining room. It was awful. The bones of her arms cracked; her muscles ached. She felt that she was going to be sick. The room was dirty with neglect, and there was the acrid smell of a tortured human body. But somehow it was done at last. The woman lay outstretched on the frowsy, tumbled bed. She was quite quiet. Now that her features were composed and the fair hair lay spread out upon the pillow, there was a kind of austere power and dignity in her clumsy ugliness. One hand, drenched with an icy sweat, held Mrs. Franklin's hand so that she dared not move. But she did not want to move. She was breathless, and

the old nausea rose and fell in her throat like a tide. But she was oddly content. She had managed. She was little and delicate, and she had lifted this big woman by herself. And the woman clung to her. Nobody had ever clung to her before. She was helpless before the coming crisis. She did not know what to do. She was quite ignorant. She was weighed with a responsibility beyond her strength. She had never been responsible in her life. And yet this woman held her close—as though she trusted her—found comfort in her—— It was very strange —rather touching.

Mrs. Franklin looked down shyly at the hand that held hers. It was a large hand, not unshapely. It made Mrs. Franklin's hand feel very small and white. The woman's eyes opened. They were blue like a sky washed with rain. They were kind, good eyes. One saw that after all she was quite young and perhaps one day would be comely again. She and Mrs. Franklin looked at each other steadily for a long time. Mrs. Franklin never knew what passed between them, or why, suddenly, against her will, without her knowledge, she bent down, whispering:

"It's going to be all right now. I'm here——"

There were voices in the other room, a shuffling of feet. Mrs. Franklin took the candle from the table and went out, closing the door softly. By the flickering light she recognised the man who had spoken to her on the roadside. And there were other men crowding in behind him. He stared at

her. At first he was incredulous. Then she saw anger flame up in his scowling eyes.

"You here!"

She nodded. She had wanted to slap his face—vulgarly, incredibly, like an angry fish-wife. That was over. She had the whiphand. She was out of reach.

He jerked his thumb over his shoulder, "Your horse has been found and sent back to wherever you belong. Better get out of this sharp."

"Thanks. Presently."

"At once, please. You've no business here. They're bringing a man in—maybe a dying man."

She put her hand up. "Please be quiet. She's asleep now. You mustn't wake her."

"She's got to know."

"Not now. There—there's a baby."

He continued to stare at her. No one had ever looked at her like that before. Not as at something to be worshipped, but as at something to be fought. "It's no place for you. We don't want your kind round here."

She had meant to go. She had thought how sweet it would be to stretch her aching body between the clean, cool sheets of the Elizabethan bed. Her expression was composed and obstinate as she looked back over her shoulder.

"I'll go when there's some one fit to take my place," she said, "—and you're not."

She closed the door noiselessly against him.

VI

The Eliots' car, sent down to fetch her, brought her home at midnight. All the windows of Ravello were alight and stared out affrightedly watching for her. The servants fluttered like bats about the hall, carrying tea and hot-water bottles to her room. Mrs. Eliot herself had, as she expressed it, "taken the liberty" of waiting in the drawing-room in case there was anything she could do. It was as though something enormous had happened. Mrs. Eliot, for the first time in their long acquaintanceship, kissed Mrs. Franklin. She was so agitated and motherly that she forgot how shy she was.

"You poor, poor thing. All alone. And among these dreadful strikers. When I heard, I sent Joseph down at once."

"So kind of you," murmured Mrs. Franklin vaguely.

She caught sight of a complete stranger in a long Venetian glass opposite—a scarecrow stranger in a mud-stained riding-suit, the stock of which, torn off in the heat of that long battle, hung limply from a gaping pocket. Her hair had come down, and she had tied it back in an untidy loop. Her face was smeared with dirt and heat—comically, incredibly dirty. She was so aghast that she hugged Mrs. Eliot, who went away with tears in her eyes, saying to herself:

"Poor soul—we shall be friends now!"

And she had visions of long talks, together, of sharing intimately in that perfect love-story.

Mrs. Franklin sent the servants to bed. She lingered about in Harry's room. She felt oddly uneasy and ashamed. The room had changed. It didn't approve. It stood aloof from her. It accused her. She had broken the solemn ritual of her days. She had become an ugly discord in the perfect harmony. She stood, warming her dirt-stained hands by the fire, and said, "Harry—oh, my darling!" over and over again, trying to call him back to her, trying to piece together her shattered personality.

For the first time since Harry's death she had not read anything that Harry loved. Remorse stabbed her to tears of physical pain. She took down Shelley from the book-shelf, and it opened inevitably at Harry's favorite poem.

"Peace—peace—he is not dead——"

How beautiful that was! How Harry had loved beautiful things! She had never seen such a tiny baby. It was hard to believe that it could really live. But the doctor seemed quite sure, and he was a nice man. He had complimented her. Nothing could have been better, he had said.

"—Awakened from the dream of life——"

Her limbs ached. She yawned with unfamiliar, delicious weariness. Perhaps, if she read in bed——? Harry would understand. After a hot bath she would be herself again. "Oh, Harry—my darling!"

Presently she lay clean and sleek between the cool sheets. The lamp burned peacefully behind her. She began to read earnestly. "Peace—peace——" Why, she had read that before—over and over again. What did it mean? Harry was dead. She couldn't believe it—or was it that she couldn't believe he had ever been alive?

Everything seemed vague and misty and unreal. Only that squalid, little room with the woman and that incredibly small baby and the man moaning on a makeshift bed by the kitchen fire. But he wouldn't die either, the doctor had assured her. "Only a couple of broken ribs, my dear lady——"

Only a couple of broken ribs! How extraordinary to talk like that! Were people always breaking their ribs—the people who didn't live at River's End?

"—He has awakened from the dream of life——"

Was she herself awake or dreaming? Had she really lived through all that—done all that? She recalled the doctor's eyes fixed on her, kindly eyes that paid her a new, intoxicating homage. Her own eyes burned. Heavy fingers were pressing down the lids. She shook herself——

"The inheritors of unfulfilled renown——"

Oh, dear. This was the verse she had always found a little heavy. Though when Harry read it —his beautiful voice—Harry darling—— "The inheritors—the inheritors——" Did it hurt terribly to have your ribs broken? It was an insult to Harry's memory to read like that—not under-

standing a single word. She would punish herself —go back to the beginning. She only hoped that woman really knew something about babies——

"—The dream of life——"

At any rate she looked clean——

Mrs. Franklin was asleep.

VII

Mrs. Eliot called at eleven o'clock the next morning. She found Mrs. Franklin in the library sorting out old stamps from a small, portable safe. Her heart ached for Mrs. Franklin. She looked so tired and listless.

"My dear," Mrs. Eliot murmured, "you *must* forgive me. So unceremonious. But I was really worried. When I didn't see you run down to bathe —I—I had quite a shock. I felt sure you must be ill. You see—you've always been a sort of time-keeper for us. I used to say to James, 'There goes Mrs. Franklin. It must be eight o'clock.' "

Mrs. Franklin's dark eyes were fixed on her with a strange expression. "I—I overslept," she said.

"Of course, my dear. So natural—after such a dreadful experience."

"It doesn't matter, does it? I shall bathe tomorrow—just as usual."

"Well, dear—you must do as you feel. I wouldn't have worried, only we've just had news that influenza was raging at Tatbury—and—and, of course—I thought of you at once. But I'm sure you will be

all right. What a wonderful collection! Of course I don't understand anything about stamps, but I'm sure it must be very valuable."

"Very—at least, I suppose so."

"She's thinking of him," Mrs. Eliot reflected tenderly. "Poor soul!"

Mrs. Franklin let a handful of precious Victorian issues slip through her fingers. "Do people with babies get influenza quicker than other people?" she asked.

Mrs. Eliot laughed out of sheer fright. "My dear—I really don't know. I never thought."

"I suppose babies can get it—new babies?"

Mrs. Eliot was spared a reply. The butler obtruded a bleak and puzzled countenance.

"If you please, ma'am. There's a person wants to see you. He wouldn't give his name."

"What sort of person, Roberts?"

"A sort of—of man, ma'am."

The butler's expression implied the worst, and Mrs. Eliot believed profoundly in the right instinct of butlers. She patted Mrs. Franklin's arm comfortingly.

"Better not, my dear. Don't let yourself be bothered."

Then she saw that Mrs. Franklin had blushed. No, it was not a blush either. It was a flush of anger, of excitement—Mrs. Eliot was too startled to be analytical. But she knew that this was a Mrs. Franklin she had never met before, a Mrs. Franklin who didn't fit into the picture of an almost un-

earthly romance, and Mrs. Eliot became suddenly fluttered and incoherent.

"Of course—you must do—just as you think, my dear. I'll go. No, no—don't bother about me. I'll let myself out—by the garden—such a lovely garden. If I may—I'll run in again—this evening."

As Mrs. Eliot went down the veranda steps, she caught a glimpse of the man who came into the room behind her—an extraordinary, horrid-looking man. And Mrs. Eliot went off shaking in every limb. She was sure now that something terrible was hanging over Ravello. Perhaps money trouble. Perhaps Mrs. Franklin had put her money into the hands of bad people. So innocent—so helpless. And yet that flush——! Oh, if only Harry Franklin were alive! If only Ravello would remain what it had always been—unspotted from the world—the shrine of little Mrs. Eliot's own secret love-story.

Meantime Mrs. Franklin confronted her visitor. She found herself rather roughly and hastily shovelling the stamps back into their box. She discovered that she did not want him to see them. But he was not looking at her at all, but about him, at the room, with an expression which might have made her very angry again. He was haggard and dishevelled like a man who has not slept. His collar was dirty. Such a person had never crossed the threshold of Harry Franklin's home. He was on her ground and at a disadvantage. She could afford to be tolerant.

He turned at her at last unsmilingly. "I didn't give you my name," he said. "If I had, you wouldn't have seen me."

"Why not?" she asked.

"My name's McAndrew—John McAndrew."

"Oh—I didn't know."

"Never heard of me?"

"I'm sorry."

"I've been running the strike down there. Perhaps you didn't know there was a strike?"

"Not till yesterday."

He gave a short laugh. "Well, that beats everything. You're wonderful, you people. A man might drop down dead outside your house and if he wasn't your sort, you wouldn't notice it."

"I've never been interested in—in industrial matters," she explained coolly.

"I bet you haven't. You don't use electricity or coal, do you? You don't draw dividends. No, I guess industry's not in your line."

She felt how easy it was for her to remain calm and well-mannered. Everything was on her side against him. "Perhaps you would like to tell me what the strike was about," she suggested kindly.

"Food. Food to live. Never heard of anybody worrying about anything so gross as food? Well, that's what it was about. It's all over now. Don't bother to pretend interest."

She knew that he wanted to hurt, and that gave her an additional advantage. Her voice was little and cool.

"That's hardly fair, is it, Mr. McAndrew? I didn't pass by on the other side yesterday. But *you* did."

He lashed out at her. "Aha—you're mighty proud of that, no doubt. You'll brag about it to your soul to your days' end. The Good Samaritan. The fine lady who soiled her pretty hands for the poor woman! Damn the crowd of you! Whetting your virtues on our misery."

"Mr. McAndrew!"

He had drawn blood. She wanted to strike back—to hurt, fair means or foul. And then, amazingly, she was sorry. She did not know why this uncouth, angry man should suddenly make her sorry. His weariness and dishevelment put his surroundings in the wrong. They became insolent. She had a queer impulse to defend him from them—from herself. She made a little, conciliatory gesture.

"Mr. McAndrew, don't let's be rude to each other. It doesn't help. What is it you came for? Won't you at least sit down and tell me?"

He shook his head. "I didn't come to call. Besides"—he gave the Elizabethan chair an ironic glance—"I'm too tired to sit down on a thing like that. No, I'll say what I have to say and be gone. I dropped in on the Pauls this morning. Mrs. Paul told me you had promised to come back. Well, you can't. The whole place is riddled with the epidemic. It's natural enough. They've no strength to fight it. By the time it's finished those that are left can turn grave diggers."

A rare Labrador fluttered from Mrs. Franklin's fingers to the floor. Presently the draft carried it out through the open window, and it was lost. Mrs. Franklin said under her breath, "Mrs. Paul!"

"Yes. She's got it. Bad. And the woman who was to have looked after her. It was like a stroke of lightning."

"The baby——?"

"Not much chance for that—— Well, I've told you."

"You could have telephoned."

He met the thrust, his eyes fixing her with a defiant stare. "I wanted to make sure."

"Thank you."

He had turned to go. At the door he swung round scowling. "What d'you mean?"

"What should I mean? I've thanked you, haven't I?"

"You're damned obstinate. I've got your back up. You'd go—just to make me mad. Well—your friends won't thank you—bringing back the infection."

"I shan't bring it back. If I go—I'll stay there."

"Bravado—bravado."

She rang the bell. She was trembling with excitement—with fear—with sheer temper. "You're very stupid, Mr. McAndrew. I like Mrs. Paul and her baby. If there's no one to look after them, I must. I suppose you did not walk here?"

"No—I had a sort of cart."

"Then you can drive me back with you."

"I'm damned if I will."

He had shouted at her. The exquisite dignity of the room was convulsed and shattered by his shouting. Nothing could ever be the same again.

"You'd rather Tatbury was wiped out," Mrs. Franklin said fiercely, "—rather than that I should help. But you can't stop me. Roberts—ask Mrs. Eliot if she will lend me her limousine—at once."

McAndrew threw up his head. "God in Heaven —a limousine!"

"It will get there quicker than your—your sort of cart."

Roberts had vanished as he had come, noiseless, aghast. They remained alone, facing each other like wrestlers who have broken apart after a breathless struggle. Gradually the red rage died out of his face. He measured her deliberately, wistfully. And she knew that for once it was not her beauty, either of mind or body that was being measured.

"Well, anyway," he said, "you've got nerve."

VIII

River's-End heard and did not believe. And then it had to believe. Mrs. Franklin was living in Tatbury—in a miner's cottage, nursing, organising, running cheek by jowl with a vulgar demagogue. Rumour had it that she herself had gone down before the epidemic and that it was touch and go with her. River's-End sent kind messages and said, "How

sad!" But it couldn't forgive. It was as though she had stolen something from them.

"She has forgotten him already," they said.

Only Mrs. Eliot stood up for her. "No—no—it's her way of remembering," she pleaded.

But when she looked out of her top window at the lovely, empty garden, she cried absurdly.

Mrs. Franklin came home two months later. She had gone down a Dresden China shepherdess, for all her forty years with the peach bloom of girlhood on her cheek, and she came back a middle-aged woman with tired, aware eyes and grey in her black hair. She came on foot at dusk and she crept into the beautiful, still house like a thief. She stood in Harry Franklin's library and looked about her. She thought how comforting it would be if only there were a deep, big chair to lie back in and rest. But it wouldn't have fitted in with the room's austerity. It wouldn't have belonged to the period. She didn't belong either. Any moment she expected some one to come in and say:

"You mustn't stay here. Don't you see that you're all wrong?"

She wandered about, touching familiar objects that had become strange. Harry's stamps—Harry's books—they seemed to her without beauty, without meaning. Or their meaning was like a thing suspended in mid-air, without foundations. And nothing was beautiful that did not have its roots in Tatbury.

She closed her eyes and whispered, "Oh, Harry, I thought of you always—always!" as she had done a hundred times during these bitter weeks, but now she knew that it is easier to lie to the living than to the dead.

She had changed. Everything else had stayed just as it was. She remembered the night the news had come of Harry's death. How gladly she had come into this beautiful room. Not a chair or table had moved, even to the fresh-cut flowers—even to the telegram waiting for her, like a scorpion——

## IX

Harry Franklin was coming home. He had been thrown, dying, into a Turkish prison and had lived to escape. It was strange that River's-End, not given to profound analysis, should have stood aghast before his homecoming as before a culminating tragedy.

Little Mrs. Eliot fell ill. Nobody knew what was the matter with her. She just flagged—didn't seem to care any more about anything. And James took her to the seaside.

John McAndrew heard and came up the same night. He said curtly—not so much as touching her hand—"What are you going to do?"

She shook her head. "I don't know."

"Going back to that poodle's life?"

"I can't."

The wide-eyed despair of her shattered his as-

sumed roughness. He came toward her, stammering, pleading.

"Come with me."

"I can't, either." She had her hand pressed against her heart. "That's the awful thing—I love him. I never loved any one else. That's real."

"Come with me. We belong together. We're of the same stuff. We could do things—out in the world."

She shook her head. And because he knew her he let his outstretched hands drop. He was a shrewd, hard man, and he did not struggle.

"Well, we've been enemies," he said. "I dare say we shall be enemies again. I didn't think I could learn to love and respect anybody of your sort. I've learned a lot I shan't forget. Most of all—I know that you can fight." He hesitated, as though he were afraid, "And you—are you sorry? I suppose you must be. It's all smashed—your pretty dream."

She was silent a moment, her hands pressed tight together as though she were trying to hold the truth between them. "Yes—it's all gone. I've lost my husband—I suppose I'm going to smash everything for him, too. But I wouldn't go back. I wouldn't. It seems to me now—I was a bad woman."

She was crying, very quietly, not seeming to know that she was crying, the tears rolling slow and unheeded down her white, thin cheeks. He looked away from her—around him—at the calm loveli-

ness of it all—and this time he did not sneer. A transfiguring pity lit up the hard face.

"God help you, my dear!"

And he was gone.

## X

She went down to the docks to meet Harry Franklin's boat. She watched it manœuvring its way out of the grey mist toward its berth, and said, "God help me!" under her breath, over and over again like some one in desperate pain. She could see Harry, standing by the bulwarks, watching the shoreline with glad, hungry eyes. She could see him come toward her and feel his arms about her—so young and gallant and magnificently happy.

And she was a little, middle-aged woman—rather tired, rather sad, burdened with knowledge.

She wasn't his wife, his companion, any more. She was his mother. She loved him deeply with an aching heart. He was a fairy-tale boy who had wanted to live forever with her in a fairy-tale palace. And for her it had become a prison.

He wouldn't understand. He would see his treasures put aside like old toys—his books untouched. And all around him would be the intruding signs of her new life—the commonplace, ugly paraphernalia of worldly, material things—and he would turn to her with hurt, astonished eyes——

"You had forgotten——"

No, not really. Never. She would hold him close

to her, pleading for herself. "They were dear to me because you loved them—they're beautiful and good—but I can't fill my life with them any more—not even with you—not even with our love—and yet, oh, my dear, I have nothing but you in the whole world——"

He would only see that she had been unfaithful—had forsaken him. She had gone after other gods. Perhaps they would go on living together—but never again in that perfect harmony. The perfect marriage would become just one more marriage—a makeshift, one more partnership of unequal partners, stumbling in their pitiful efforts to keep step.

Or should she make the sacrifice of her integrity—lie to him, pretend like a mother playing with her child—sell her vision of life so that his should be untroubled? No—no—that wasn't worthy of her—nor worthy of his real dignity. She would have to say to him:

"This is what I have become. What are we to do?"

She would lose him. And she would love him till she died.

Other watchers wondered why the faded, middle-aged woman looked so sad—as though the grey, oncoming ship were bringing her only black sorrow.

It came gliding heavily alongside. There were people crowded against the bulwarks—waving—calling—— She grew dizzy and blind with fear. Oh, God—if he had only died—for both their sakes!

A gangway was let down. They came swarming down—these faceless, meaningless figures. They were welcomed—kissed—jokes fluttered about them —little, tremulous jokes of happy people. Mrs. Franklin did not move. She stood there with clenched hands.

A man came down the gangway. Very slowly. A steward was helping him. A bearded, elderly man, gaunt-cheeked—stooping—grey-looking. She watched him, fascinated. She saw his hand rest on the gangway rope—a beautiful, white hand grown thin—grown old. His eyes lifted from the painfully taken steps. They were the eyes of some one who has suffered and seen great suffering. They searched the crowd—face by face. It was as though she were looking into her own mirror. That same hunger—the same deadly fear——

She called his name. He turned toward her. For an instant they remained motionless, staring at each other.

Then she was in his arms—laughing and crying.

## VIII

## *"To the Unknown——"*

### I

LYN ROSCOE turned to look back at the room before he closed the door. It was a very beautiful room and a strange contrast to the dim landing and the chill stone stairs, sombrely lit by a gas-jet, and leading down, like the stairs of a prison, into a black well. It breathed out warmth, a rich fragrance, a conscious serenity. It was like a wealthy and lovely woman who is at peace with herself and the world because she is strong and unassailable and there is nothing that can be denied her. By the last glimmer of the fire he could see the stately mahogany writing-table and his books, shining a mellow golden brown and mounting in serried ranks high up into the shadow. The thick Turkey carpet, where the light caught it, glowed back luxuriously.

And yet, Roscoe thought, there was something lacking still. Enid and he had gone over it point by point the day before, and Enid had said in her low, comfortable voice, "It's quite perfect, Lyn," and he had agreed because, for the life of him, he could not have pointed out anything that was wrong. Besides, it would have seemed ungrateful. She had

lavished such generous care over every detail that could minister to his comfort. She had foreseen every errant fancy as though his mind had been an open book to her. Her understanding had always been wonderful, a little laboured perhaps, and rarely reaching down into the final secret, but earnest and painstaking. It was as though she had said to herself, "He is a great man and all great men are queer," and she had set herself to learn the unexpected turns and twists of his temperament as a rider learns the tricks of a nervous thoroughbred. If he had suddenly demanded the moon she would have looked at him with her calm, pure eyes and said, "Yes, Lyn, if we can get it you shall have it, dear." But he felt she would not have understood why he wanted it. And he could never explain.

When he had told her of this room she had responded gallantly, without so much as a change of colour, though he knew how such a break in the rhythm of their lives would trouble her. She had nodded, smiling.

"I've often wondered how you could bear it, always at home, always in the same atmosphere. And then the children, they don't mean to be naughty. And it isn't naughty for children to be naughty, is it?"

And she had set out with him to find this ideal workshop, and when they had found it in the noble rat-haunted Adam's house overlooking the misty river she had thrown herself into the furnishing with all the energy of her orderly mind. She had even

astonished him with the opulence of her ideas. In the home she was careful, a trifle cheese-paring, but for this nothing could be too rare. He fancied she liked things better if they cost more.

"I haven't forgotten how you used to write on cheap paper in that awful Bloomsbury attic. Poor Lyn! Now you shall have everything—everything you fancy, dear."

And he had been touched and somehow saddened by her air of calm, royal triumph.

It *was* a beautiful room. He closed and locked the door with a sigh. Queer that he had not been able to work there. He had come to it in the early morning, his heart thudding against his ribs for very hope. Perhaps now, he had thought, in the midst of such harmony, the old fires would re-kindle, the old torturing, glorious spirit of creation would come back to haunt him. (But at the bottom of his heart, curled up malevolently, had been a little cold fear. And all day long he had sat at the handsome table and looked out over the grey river, at the masts piercing the mists and the motor-launches scurrying like rats over the turgid water, and the tumbled pile of warehouses that had looked back at him with their air of sober romance. And from time to time he had set down a few sentences of the new book—perfectly adequate neat sentences, technically unexceptional, lifeless, colourless.

The little cold fear had uncurled itself. The very peace seemed to strip him naked so that for fear of what he should see he had got up to escape—

to get back to Enid and the children and the beautiful Lutyens house (built out of the proceeds of his last success). In the midst of their cheerful warmth he would laugh at this attack of nerves, thinking, "Why, I'm the biggest novelist living. I can sell every line I write. I'm on the top of the crest." And he would sit down in his immaculate evening clothes to a well-ordered table, and the servants would flit decorously among the shadows of the softly lighted room. And over the fresh-cut flowers he would look across at Enid and meet her smile, so serene and gracious and content.

But he did not go straight home. Instead he turned into a sinister little alley which ran downhill from the Strand and crossed the broad Embankment with its clanging trams and bustling traffic to the river's edge. There he stopped, leaning his elbows on the stone parapet as he had done once before when he had been a very young man, waiting for nightfall and a chance to curl up, undisturbed by prowling policemen, on one of the benches and go to sleep. He could remember everything he had felt and seen that night. He had not eaten for twenty-four hours, and his last decent pair of boots had just burst hopelessly across the instep. But he had been like a god. The idea of "The Last Adventurer" (afterwards it had run into thirty editions) had just come to him, and his mind was like a huge brilliantly lit stage on which the characters lived, apart from him, free-will creations of an omniscient creator. He had not known that his body

was numb with cold and weak from hunger. Every inch of him blazed with light. He had been so happy that he had cried and he had bowed his starved young face in his hands and had poured out a humble, heaven-besieging prayer of praise and gratitude. Ludicrously happy. The long terrible night of germination was over. The seed had broken through the hard earth and now was to come fruition—harvest.

It had happened suddenly. He had gone, as a last hope, to a publisher who had once, years before, promised him a job, and the publisher had sent down a bored message that he was busy. Enid had brought the message. So he had seen her for the first time. He had looked into her quiet dear eyes and it had been done. Something had gone out of her to him and touched him with a transfiguring glory. So strong, so fine and steadfast she had seemed in her youth and goodness. She had spoken to him gently, with a sorrowful understanding for what must have been pitiably apparent, and the low full notes of her voice, with its hint of a brooding motherliness, had been like music in his ears, like soft rain on his hard heart. He had stammered some futile answer and had gone out. But now he loved. The crude youthful bitterness had melted like snow at the breath of spring. The world shone with warmth and colour and sunshine. He had become miraculously reconciled to life and man and the floodgates of inspiration were flung wide.

Then years of fine work and clean-limbed, clear-

eyed austerity—hard years of grinding poverty and rich happiness. Then the war. He had fought and written. He had renounced life, like other men, with the simple gesture that ennobled him and gave him dignity and peace. There was a night in the trenches before that last onslaught when he had written the finest lines of his work, and had felt serene and ineffably joyous as though he had broken through into the presence of God.

He remembered it all as one remembers an old story. But the spirit of it was lost to him. It concerned some one else—a young fellow, lean and ardent, burning like a tall white-hot flame.

From where he stood he could see Blackfriars Bridge, spanning the gulf in a golden arch, and the buses running across like anxious fireflies. Somewhere in the mist Westminster lifted a proud, watchful shadow. Beneath were the lightless hulks of ships, asleep after their long voyage. One of them he could distinguish—scarcely more than a trawler, slender and over delicate, which to-morrow with its handful of a crew was to set out for the frozen ends of the earth, seeking knowledge but most of all the old glory of living—danger, suffering and perhaps death.

He closed his eyes and listened to the footfalls of the passers-by. They came out of silence and grew loud and clear and died into silence again. And in each sound was a mystery—a universe. He seemed to be standing on a lonely rock in the midst of life, looking down into its magic waters in which

romance floated like seaweed, spreading itself in lustrous golden pattern against the stony bottom, moving softly with the tide. But when he caught it out into the air and light it fell dead and colourless in his hands.

He thought: "I'm old." But he knew that that was absurd. He was not forty yet. It was the fire that had gone—the splendid authentic fire that blazing down upon each lifeless incident made it to glow and live.

"It's my soul," he thought. "My soul's grown fat. If it ever grows thin again it'll be because it has withered." And suddenly the little fear became monstrous and closed down on him like a cold hand. And he turned, shivering, away.

* * * * *

It held him until the moment when he heard his key turn in the lock. Then, in the soft, warm light of the hall it let him go. But he had a queer conviction that this time it had slunk into the house and lay in wait, watching him.

A prettily uniformed housemaid flitted across the passage into the dining-room. The familiar fragrance of a gracious refinement and meticulous order laved him like a narcotic. It stupefied unrest and dissatisfaction. He caught a glimpse of himself in the hall glass as he passed and saw the handsome, calm face of a successful man. Enid called him from the drawing-room and he went in. A clean bright fire was burning. The silver rose-bowl on the

Sheraton table flickered with its dancing reflections. There were flowers everywhere. All the crude flamboyant expression of his youthful taste had long since been weeded out and there was not a picture or ornament in the room that was not exquisitely right.

Enid had been sitting by the fire. Now with a slow strong movement she rose to meet him. She was tall and once she had been slender but she had broadened out into a lovable matronliness. Her crown of fair hair was as thick as it had ever been, and if there were lines on her pleasant face they were the ennobling and beautiful lines of some one who has never thought basely or unkindly.

He liked the simple black dress she wore. He always like the way she dressed. Step by step, without a stumble, she had kept pace with him.

She put her hands on his shoulders and kissed him softly on both cheeks.

"Late, Lyn!"

"A little, dear. I'm sorry."

"It doesn't matter a bit. I warned cook. Don't change. Just run up and say good night to the children."

He went up into the dark sleepy nursery. He had always loved this moment—so touchingly intimate and tender—but to-night an odd sense of unreality lamed him. These two drowsy scraps of life whose hot fingers twined themselves into his, were they really his children? He felt like a cold unsubstantial shadow of himself.

Afterwards he sat opposite Enid, just as he had foreseen, and the prettily dressed parlourmaid stood by the sideboard, motionless and watchful for his slightest need. It struck him for the first time as odd that a friendly human being should be in the room and that they should not speak to her. There was a time—on the Embankment, for instance—when she would not have spoken to him but shrunk away.

He looked up and met Enid's smiling eyes.

"Did you have a good day, Lyn?"

He laughed ruefully.

"Not very, I'm afraid. I stuck fast."

"I knew you would." She nodded to herself, with a look of tender happy wisdom. "It's all so new—too new. I could see you, you know—like a boy with a roomful of new playthings—moving about, picking them up, spreading yourself in lordly possession before the fire. But after you have worked a little it will grow warm and familiar. It will get a heart. And you will settle down."

"That's it," he said, smiling back at her understanding.

He knew that his fear grinned cynically, and he thought how strange it was that two people should live together, day in, day out, for years, loving each other, knowing each other's moods and fancies, and yet know nothing of the dark secret places of each other's lives. He looked at her stealthily. How calm and satisfied she was! Of course they loved one another. No serious cloud had ever overshad-

owed their married life. She was everything that a woman could be—generous and brave and loyal. She would die for him and the children—as he would die for her—taking it as a matter of course—gladly.

And yet——

That first meeting—those few days of wooing—those first months of divine intimacy. Was it true that then to have been in her presence had been to live in the light that was not of this earth—that her touch had had the power to lift him above the reach of pain or sickness or despair? He had walked Paradise like a humble god because of her kiss.

And then——

Something insidious had happened. Their first child had come. It had been born in anguish and amidst all the hideous squalor of their grinding poverty. For a few days she had been unrecognisable—a shattered human personality, wrecked, helmless, and his love and pity had risen to intolerable heights. But afterwards something had gone, the golden glory, the ecstasy of worship. He had become suddenly the leader—the bearer of burdens, the protector who could look in future to nothing higher than his own strength. He noticed that when she sang to herself she sang a little out of tune. And she had an annoying trick, when she was thinking, of drumming with her fingers on the table. But he had always been very gentle and tolerant because he was just and because he loved her deeply.

So they had come down from their Pisgah, slowly,

hand in hand, with no ugly falls by the wayside. And ever since they had walked the pleasant plains together and the less fortunate had marvelled at their serene happiness.

Their love was like those sentences he had written —balanced, unexceptional.

"Lyn, Mrs. Carruthers called this afternoon. She asked after you. I could see how disappointed she was to find only the author's wife at home. She said how she loved your last book."

He had started guiltily. (What did it matter about his last book? Why couldn't people understand that a creator cares nothing for what he has created but only for the thing that he is to create—for that other chance of complete fulfilment?)

"It's very kind of her." Then he exploded with a good-natured laugh, "The woman's an ass."

"Yes, I know, dear. But I like her."

"Because she likes my books?"

She blushed girlishly.

"It may be that."

They smiled into each other's eyes. He knew that the parlourmaid was thinking in her vernacular, "Aren't they sweet on one another?"

And then suddenly there broke out of his heart a withering, terrible cry:

"Shall I never feel like that—never, never love again like that? Never—in all my life?"

II

It was a strange place to find in a great city. In the midst of the restless clamour and movement was this cavern of silence—enormous, reaching up into unlimited obscurity, bounded by invisible mysterious barriers. Though it was early in the afternoon it was full of a yellow darkness. The many-eyed lamps that struggled against the fog stared but gave no light. The great pillars were like monster trees, looming out of the night and spreading vast sable branches overhead. Stray footfalls sounded loud and solemn down their avenues. An occasional verger fluttered, black-winged, from one shadow to another.

Lyn Roscoe had come here, following an errant fancy. There seemed nowhere else to go. He had not been able to work in the beautiful room overlooking the river. And he did not want to go home because of Enid's sympathy and understanding. She would have been so gentle with him, humouring what would have seemed only another of those unhappy sterile moods from which genius suffered. Then, as the low door of the Abbey had swung to behind him, he had been aware of an instant dramatic change. He seemed to have left his listless disillusioned maturity behind in the noisy street. Even his success had dropped from him. The statues of the great dead that in the daylight dwarfed and deformed the transept were now living ghosts who communed silently with one another. They shone above him

with some pale inner radiance. Among them he felt suddenly young and unsophisticated and humble. He went forward with baited breath like an adventurer on the verge of an undiscovered land. And from step to step he became more aware of tension—of a tightening of all his faculties to an acute sensitiveness, a stirring of the torpid blood.

The fog made it seem that he was passing from one half-lit cave to another. In the circumscribed orbit of yellow light were pews, and here and there a bowed faceless figure of some other traveller resting by the wayside. He came suddenly into a clearing. It was as though the trees of this strange wilderness had been cut away to make place for a great camp or for some stupendous ceremonial. The light from the great window overhead was like the last glimmer of an unearthly sunset. It confused him. He stumbled against something and drew back quickly, almost afraid, as though the obstacle had been a living thing—helpless and tender—which he had hurt. He bent down and touched it and petals of dead flowers fell from his fingers. Then he knew. Of course. He knew, too, though he could not read, what was written on the sodden crumpled card:

"To the Unknown——"

He remained there, arrested. The sense of some great impending event was strong on him. It was as though a door were about to be flung open, and again, as in the old days, he should feel and see poignantly.

So great was that suspense that he held his breath, waiting. Then he knew that he was not alone. Some one was standing on the other side of the grave, a slender, shadowy figure. A woman. She was so still that he did not know how long she had been there. She did not seem quite real. Her face was bowed. She might have been some sorrowful *revenant*. And then through the yellow dusk his astonished eyes gathered the reassuring humanness of her dress—the graceful fur cap set on the dark hair, the austere lines of her coat and skirt, the muff in which her hands hung loosely clasped. There was an unexpected poise and confidence in her bearing because somehow he knew already that she was quite young.

With a flash of the old imaginative vision he thought, "She is still a girl. But she has lost some one she loved and has suffered a great deal."

He felt that it was not decent to look at her or wonder at her. He bent his eyes to the ground again. Neither of them moved. It seemed a long but not a painful waiting in which they were both groping towards one another with just the grave between them.

Suddenly she looked up. The pale oval face was like a faint light through the gloom. Her dark steadfast eyes met his and the strange intimacy that had been conceived in the silence and emptiness broke into life.

"We three," she said, "three unknown people who

will never know each other's names, or where we are going, or whence we come."

It did not seem in the least strange that she should speak to him and in these terms. The place was set apart from the rest of the world and here humanity met stripped of its conventions and its insincerities. To the end of time whatever was spoken or thought here would have to be true, and the thought that she had expressed was inevitable. It had been in his mind, too, so that her voice with its faint foreign inflection was like an echo.

"Yes, it's strange," he said, "and very pitiful."

"You too were a soldier?" she asked simply.

"Yes."

"You might have been here."

He nodded, and then without premeditation, as though his sub-consciousness had broken through his guard, he said:

"A great deal of me does lie buried there, a great deal of every one who survived—faith, enthusiasm."

"Romance," she said.

He started a little. That was somehow a releasing word. It had been as though she had touched a note that vibrated through all his nerves. He answered gravely:

"I hadn't thought of that, but it is true."

"People will always come here," she went on in the same remote way, "people who have lost no one and will gaze down and dream and wonder. Who was it? Some simple boy who didn't think much about anything, too simple to be even afraid perhaps.

A fearless fellow who didn't suffer at all, a coward who went into it shrinking, a brave man who was horribly frightened, a lover, a genius, a coarse young man who kissed his girl and got drunk on Saturday nights. And all of them, if they had been told they were to lie here would have joked about it, the poet most of all, because he was English, and you English laugh when other people cry."

He smiled gently across at her.

"You know us very well."

But she seemed intent on her own thought.

"They should have written: 'Here lies the most romantic thing that ever happened in the world.'"

"And the most tragically ironical."

"If we had known his name—'Thomas Atkins, the representative of the common man'—it would have been different, wouldn't it? We should have known who he was. His picture would have been in the papers and we should have paid him one visit of respect. But to the Unknown, we shall come back to him for ever. It's the unknown that we seek, that makes it possible for us to live. It's like a high mountain that no one has ever climbed, or an untravelled country, or"—she stammered a little as though all at once she had realised how strange it was that she should be thinking aloud—"or like some one one loves for the first time."

He did not answer. Her voice with its faint mysterious accent and its eager sincerity touched him deeply. He felt that it was very wonderful that she should speak so openly of what was in her heart.

He felt oddly gentle and humble towards her.

She turned away a moment later and he turned with her and walked beside her. The unearthly yellow darkness was growing grey with the onset of evening. A hurrying verger peered at them admonishingly.

"Hurry out, please. Closing time."

But even he spoke in an undertone.

"We're going back into the world," she said.

It made him realise what had happened.

"When I came in, I don't know even now why I came, it was the fog and—well, the dreariness of going home to a comfortable home and a good dinner, and I was feeling inert, utterly blank. Now I feel as though I'd lived through some sort of experience."

"I think only some one with a dead soul could come in here and not be changed," she said with her quaint air of wisdom.

"Then my soul's not dead." He smiled wistfully. "Do you know, I almost thought it was. I couldn't feel anything, and I was scared, terribly frightened. I could have cried with relief because my heart jumped when you said, 'Romance. Here lies the Greatest Romance——' "

She was silent. They went down the transept side by side. The door swung back behind them and the spell which had made their odd companionship seem so natural was broken. They were plunged in a chill reality. And yet something fantastic and faërie still lingered about them like a

faint cloud of incense. They looked at one another. It seemed to him that he saw her for the first time. She had been a sort of spirit with whom his spirit had spoken. Now she was a stranger—a woman. He saw her lifted face in the light of a street lamp—a pale, girl's face, elfishly beautiful, ardent and proud and candid.

She held out her hand.

"Shall we? Because we both understood?"

He stammered, half laughing.

"Why, that doesn't seem a reason, does it? For saying good-bye like that. Wouldn't you let me see you safe through the fog? I'm awfully, horribly respectable."

"I don't know that I am. I think I'm an adventuress. That isn't respectable, is it? But if you want to, my rooms aren't far from here."

"You're—you're not English, are you?"

"I'm a Russian."

"A Russian."

"Does that frighten you? Not a Bolshevik."

"A princess," he said whimsically.

"I was one. A princess in exile. It doesn't matter. Now there are only princesses in fairy stories."

"I write fairy stories for grown-up people. I used to live in one. I'd almost forgotten what it was like. I'm beginning to remember."

The fog swirled around them in a yellow cloud. From the side street into which they had turned they could hear the sullen roar of traffic and see the lights

groping their way through like stupefied fireflies. But they themselves walked alone. Their footsteps rang out like the steps of survivors in a desolate city.

"You're Lyn Roscoe, aren't you?"

He came out of his reverie. He had been imagining, wondering. A princess. Why, he might have known it. That indescribable air of race, of ancient familiarity with the highest and best in life which gave her that subtle poise and dignity. A princess. Some one who had lost everything—and nothing.

"Yes, I'm Lyn Roscoe," he said stupidly, "whoever he may be."

"I was sure. Not in the Abbey, but outside. I'd seen your picture. But you looked older in the picture. You seem too young."

"For what?"

"To have written like that."

"How do you know?"

"I read a book of yours. It's upstairs in my room now. I bought it when I was very poor and I read it when I didn't know whether I could live. I had memories, you see, which made living very difficult. I couldn't drive them away for a moment. Then I began reading and suddenly I found that I had forgotten—for a whole hour."

"I'm glad," he said unsteadily, "I'm glad I helped, princess."

She shook her head.

"Oh, no. Not that. That's over. I'm Marie

Barenoff, an artist who makes an honest living painting dishonest portraits here."

She had stopped and he stood hat in hand before her in the dripping darkness. He felt oddly young and gallant and light-hearted.

"We're not the Unknown any more," he said. "We've been introduced. We know each other."

She answered with her queer gravity.

"We know each other's names, Mr. Roscoe."

That night Enid came out to meet him. Perhaps she had been anxious. She put her hands on his shoulders and kissed him. But he was busy getting out of his coat and her lips just brushed against his face.

"You're late, darling."

"I suppose I am; I'm sorry."

"I'm not. I'm glad. It means you've had a good day's work, doesn't it?"

"Work? Yes, it began to come—for the first time." He wondered why he lied to her. He had never lied to her before. He was excited. His hand shook a little. "How did you know?"

She laughed. Was it only his fancy or was there something puzzled and seeking in her tranquil eyes.

"Because—because you look as though something wonderful had happened to you."

III

He took her his first book and read it to her. As he read he was astonished that he could ever have

written anything so beautiful. Surely somebody else had written it. And at first he was full of anguish because of all that had happened to him. He seemed to be looking down on the grave of a young man and thinking, "If only you could have been spared and I taken." But gradually he began to remember. It was as though in secret some one were blowing softly on dying embers and that they began to glow and kindle.

Marie Barenoff sat opposite him in the firelight and listened, and each time that he lifted his eyes to her he received the impression of her like a red-hot brand upon the heart, so that he caught his breath in a kind of exquisite pain. Fine and keen and beautiful as a Damascus blade she seemed, strong and infinitely delicate.

He loved the room in which she was set like a jewel. It was different from anything he had ever seen. It was an attic that was a studio by reason of its northern skylight and led into another attic that was her bedroom. The walls sloped so that it was like a magic cave full of treasure. Everything in it was rare and beautiful and unconscious of its beauty. An ikon of faded gold and rich dark colours, mellowed with age, hung where the light fell upon its austere and mystic piety. There were strange stuffs too, falling in gracious lines, into which antiquity had woven an inexpressible pathos. Everything had suffered and seen suffering but none of them had known indignity.

She was like that too. Even as he read his sub-

conscious self was busy with her. Behind the reserve which guarded the life from which she came he visioned Horror itself. There must be blood on many of those relics. She said that she had been poor and fugitive, but she did not know what ugliness was—the ugliness of quiet respectable homes and fumed oak furniture and passionless virtue. He thought of his own home with its order, its spruce second-hand perfection, the fluttering white-aproned maids, the shining modern silver, the too great cleanliness. And Enid—Enid, so tranquil and assured and gracious in her black dress, so eminently right.

And his heart contracted with a kind of nausea, of satiety, of disgust.

He closed the book and let it drop scornfully on the floor beside him.

"It's great," he said. "I can say it now, because I shall never write like that again."

He put his face down in his hands, hiding from her.

"Yes—yes."

"You don't understand," he went on dully. "I'm a successful man. I've got everything, a comfortable home and money and reputation. I've got two lovely children and a wife who is the finest woman in the world, who is faithful to me and to whom I have been faithful to my last thought. No, it is all finished, the adventure is over. I'm safe in port. Nothing happens there."

"One takes on cargo," she said dreamily. "One awaits the tide."

Her voice, metallic and sweet, shook his heart. He looked up at her with a faint smile.

"What do you know of life?"

It was a question, asked not in mockery but in wonder. She was leaning forward now and colour had come up under the pallor of her skin like light shining behind ivory. Mysterious and alien she was, young and infinitely old. He felt that those grey eyes had seen countries and strange things that had gone under in a world cataclysm. She was a sort of exquisite survival of something that was lost for ever but which he could still remember, more and more vividly, like a slow return to consciousness from a deep narcotic, the life which he had once lived so ardently, which he had said farewell to with so young and gallant a gesture, marching at the head of his men to the song of the drums.

"I used to be like you," she said. "It was a sort of prison and I looked through the bars, wondering if they would ever melt and let me out. I had so much, so many people to love and be loved by, such pretty dresses, such swift, beautiful horses, servants who bowed to me when I passed. And then, in one night, all gone."

"Marie Barenoff," he murmured. It was as though he had seen it all, the magic splendour, the secret gathering together of evil, desperate forces, an explosion, the wild rush of flames striking at the

stars, dark flying figures, a red-hot molten mass, sinking to a sullen smouldering darkness.

"Then I came here," she said more lightly, "like a strange migratory bird flying from storm into all this peace, taking refuge for a while till it has preened its wings for another flight."

"Couldn't you be content?" he asked hurriedly.

She shook her head.

"Like you?"

He made a gesture of resignation.

"No—no, I wouldn't have you like that. I want to think of you always, princess, living and growing."

"Mr. Roscoe, why do you call me 'princess'?"

"Mayn't I? Since I think of you as one. I am such a plain fellow—a bit of a snob, perhaps. I've never known a princess before. It's like a bright patch of colour somewhere in my mind. I shall always say to myself, 'I knew a princess once, a real princess who set out on the great adventure which I have missed.'"

"There are all sorts of adventures, Mr. Roscoe. Wasn't that an adventure too, there in the Abbey?"

He felt his heart leap against his ribs. He could not lift his eyes above her hands, slender, beautiful hands lying loosely clasped on her knees and shining like alabaster in the firelight.

"Yes, something happened."

Now he looked up and their eyes met. It was an accident which left them both stunned and for a moment incapable of action, as though their eyes had been wrestlers who had suddenly fallen into a deadly

grip from which neither could escape. Swiftly she stood up.

"There is a picture I wanted to show you before you go, some one you know."

He followed her as in a dream. His arm brushed against hers. There was a cloud about her laden with magic. He could see her walking, as she moved now, with that unconscious dignity of inheritance, through barbaric halls of state, trailing the train of her golden robes. He could see the crown on her dark hair and the servants bowing before her and he himself.

It was crazy, unreal, and yet, when he forced himself to think coolly, not so unreal as Enid and the children had become. When he tried to visualise them they appeared pale and static figures, lifeless as waxworks. He could not make them live. He thrust them out of his mind.

She held a sketch for him to see. It was himself as he had been. He stood behind her and like a humble passionate thief he let his mouth brush against her hair. She could not have seen or felt him, and yet for a moment they both stood so still that they could hear each other's breath.

Then he drew back. He spoke in a loud conventional voice.

"It's splendid. I'd like Enid to come to see it, for you to get to know each other, but I'm afraid. Enid's so English. Our home would stifle you. You wouldn't understand."

She followed him to the door.

"It's as you think best," she said tranquilly.

Her hand rested in his. He held it lightly, yet it was as though they could not free themselves. He felt her warmth steal up his arm to his heart. The half-light in which they stood enveloped them in a mysterious isolation.

"Marie Barenoff," he murmured again as though the name were a spell. "Princess."

He bent and kissed her hand.

Afterwards, in the street, he saw how foolish and romantic he had been. How young.

He wandered the streets blindly, he did not know for how long. But presently he telephoned home. His voice in the hot, evil-smelling box sounded calm and commonplace.

"Yes, I'll be very late. Don't sit up for me. I'm in the vein. I want to keep going." He caught his breath. He could see her in her black evening dress, and the maid in the passage waiting to know if dinner was to be kept back any longer. He went on deliberately. "I don't like disturbing you. It worries me. Have the bed made up in my dressing-room."

It was such a natural thing for him to have suggested. He was so sure that nothing in his voice had betrayed him. And yet that pause, that perceptible pause, as though she had started and shrunk back. It was his imagination, his heated, quivering imagination.

"Of course, Lyn. I quite understand. I'm so glad. Good night, my darling."

"Good night."

He hung up the receiver, trembling with relief and thankfulness, like an escaped prisoner.

IV

In the days that followed strange things happened to Lyn Roscoe. He had loved Tony and Lynette, his children. His feeling for them had seemed to be the one vital emotion left him. Their littleness, the thought that their individual, mysterious life should have risen, like twin springs, from his and from Enid's love, had thrilled him with pity and wonder and an aching tenderness which once or twice had rekindled passion only to die almost at once under the stifling commonplaceness of their daily life.

But he had always loved them.

And now he did not love them at all.

They knew it. Whilst Enid remained confident and quiet in her dangerous wisdom they knew. They fell silent when custom drove him to their nursery. They dropped their games, looking at him shyly and distrustfully as at a stranger.

"I told them how deep you are in your work," Enid said. "It's wonderful how they understand. The minute you come into the house they are as quiet as mice."

She smiled happily at him and he turned away, impatient and yet unmoved. He simply could not realise her. He could not remember what he had

ever felt for her. But once, seated before the fire, he had looked up from out of a formless fierce-coloured reverie and had seen her opposite him, so composed and immaculate, and an anger against her, terrifying in its black hideousness, leapt like a tiger out of his secret life. For one shattering moment he knew how it was that wicked men could kill the thing that stood across their way.

And the strangest thing of all was that he who had thought and reasoned as a civilised man, dealing subtly and finely with the intricacies of life, could now only demand with the primitive directness of a savage. Once indeed he had told himself, "I must not see her again," but that had been only a conventional gesture. His heart and brain had scorned it with high laughter.

"You shall—you will!"

He was working brilliantly now, without effort, hardly knowing what it was he wrote. He had become the will-less instrument of a creative force outside himself. His mind, even as his hand set down the things that were to lift him high above his previous levels, was straining like a passionate captive towards the hour of release when he could go to her. And when that hour came he was like a man carried on a frail raft on the breast of a headlong torrent. He could look about him and see the world in splendour and fire melt past him from one vivid pulsating picture into another. The hearts of men were opened in their breasts for him to gaze into, and he thought in his dizzy sense of power how he would

make their lives live for ever. Most splendid of all, the old spiritual deafness was gone. He heard, with the intoxicating clearness of those whose lost hearing has been miraculously restored, the song of the river with its burden of high romance and great adventure—but as yet, only in the far distance, the thunder of the cataract towards which he was being borne, faster and faster.

He reached its brink almost in a moment. That day he was not to have seen her. She had made some excuse. Perhaps his instinct, goaded by desire, had warned him. He came upon her in the chaos of a prepared and desperate flight.

It was a queer interview—brief, terrible in its mounting ecstasy. All around her were the uprooted symbols of her life. He felt that his own life was threatened, that he was being torn out of his soil, bleeding, withering.

He asked:

"You were going away?" And she laughed with defiance in her eyes.

"Migratory birds fly with the seasons. My season here is over."

"Migratory birds do not fly alone," he retorted, laughing back at her. "They have their mates, princess."

They had been standing, facing each other like enemies. Now she sat down, as though her strength had gone from her, and the next instant he was at her feet, his arms about her, his face pressed against her breast. It was no mastering, possessive passion.

It was adoration and surrender. He gave himself to her. He lost himself in her mystery. He had ceased to be the strong self-sufficient man, arid of emotion and faith. He was the dreamer kneeling against the feet of the inspiration which had given him re-birth. The warmth and sweetness of it enveloped him in a cloud of incense. He felt her kiss upon his head, her hands on his bowed shoulders.

Then they were silent, motionless. He dared not move lest the unearthly wonder of the moment should be broken. Like a song of praise his heart and brain re-echoed, "I love—I love again."

Her hands tightened. He heard her speak, her low voice with its faint, exotic inflections that gave her simplest words the charm of a strange music.

"I've suffered, Lyn, unspeakable things. Yet I have been a spoilt woman too. I've taken whatever I desired of life and held it with all my strength. But I will not steal—I will not steal."

"Take what is yours!" he answered.

"Your wife—your children."

"They are not mine any more. I've lost them. I've left them behind. We were travellers together for a time, but I can't travel their road with them any more. I've got to get back to the high places where it is hard and dangerous to live—to you."

"Your wife," she repeated urgently. "What suffering we should make for her!"

He tried to think of Enid. He could not see her save as a dim, unreal figure, stolid, worthy.

"She won't suffer—not as we suffer. She will be

shocked. But she has the home—the children. That is her world. I was stifling, dying in it, and I have a right to live. You have given me everything I am—take me—keep me."

Strange wooing, humble, irresistible, dominating and ruthless as the instinct of self-preservation. Suddenly with all her strength she held him close to her.

"If we go it must be now, for always, far from the things to which you belong."

He answered in triumph:

"I belong to you."

## V

Though he left her then it was late that night when he turned the key of his house. All the lights had been turned out save the one that burnt at the foot of the stairs, and he stopped short at sight of it with a strange check of the heart. Was it the artist in him, wrought up to an intense perceptiveness, which recognised a symbol? Sanctuary light. A little fire that burnt steadily and patiently as a reminder of something that endured for ever beyond the fret and fever of man's desires. He closed the door softly. It was as though he were afraid of waking more than the quiet sleepers of the house. So long as he could remember he had never seen his home as he saw it now. Its gently bustling well-being had dropped from it like a formal dress. It greeted him in silence and shadow. Silence and

shadow veiled his possessions with a mysterious dignity. Their loveliness stood free from the dross of his success. And there was pathos, too, about them, as there is pathos in all things that sleep, in all inanimate things that have fallen from tired human hands. Enid's work-box, neatly closed, stood on the round table by the fire. He could see her sitting there, working and listening, and then when it grew too late she had got up, sighing quietly, and slipped her needle and scissors to their place and closed the box with her gentle air of setting a seal upon another day honourably lived.

Now she was asleep. He crept past her door, past the children's room. Something touching, too, in the thought of all the defenceless mystery of life that lay in these dark silences so near akin to death. He felt like a thief slinking through a holy place steeped in innocence and mild-eyed goodness. He was thankful to reach the shelter of his own room and to switch on the brazen lights which freed him from the spell of that hushed twilight.

A little bunch of violets stood in the vase upon his dressing-table. He saw them first. His eyes focused themselves upon them as upon something blazingly salient. She had put them there—silent and eloquent. He felt for a moment that he was on the edge of some stupendous realisation, like a man living in a dream who by one final effort of the will could burst through into reality.

But he did not want to wake. Would not. This was the truth—the greater reality. He thrust the

violets out of sight and listened to the pounding of his blood.

"To-morrow—to-morrow!"

VI

He let Enid kiss him good-bye. He kissed his shy children. He did not realise them at all. He said to himself, "This is my wife who has been my loyal comrade, and these are my children whom I am deserting without thought or pity." But it meant nothing to him. His reason had ceased to function, and emotionally an explanation, even a warning, would have seemed as superfluous as an explanation to complete strangers.

He felt nothing when the door of his home closed behind him.

He spent the day buying what he required for the immediate journey. Nothing was to be carried over from the past. A new beginning—a new youth.

It had been arranged that he should fetch Marie Barenoff from her rooms in time to catch the night boat-train, so that there remained at the end of his feverish shopping two hours to wait. He returned to his room to pick up a favourite book and his manuscript. There too he would write to Enid. His literary genius would have to lend him the required expression of affectionate regret and decent remorse, to give life to that extraordinary deadness.

The door of the room was unlocked. The lamp

on his writing-table had been switched on, and just beyond its shaded circle of light he saw Marie Barenoff waiting for him. His heart leapt to his throat at sight of her and there was fear in that suffocating joy. She stood there so very still, just as she had done on the other side of the grave, her body relaxed, her hands clasped loosely in her muff. She looked like some dark wild bird that had beaten its way into his room and might again take flight.

"Marie, how—why did you come?"

He closed the door sharply as an involuntary expression of his dread, and she smiled, a little ruefully, in understanding.

"It's all right. I knew you would come here first. Your caretaker let me in when she found me waiting. I—I wanted to see your room, Lyn."

He breathed a sigh of deep relief.

"I am glad you came. It was so long to wait. I meant just to fetch my manuscript."

"It's here. I've been reading it. It's better than anything you have ever done."

"You gave me the power."

Her eyes lifted to his with a dark tenderness.

"Oh, Lyn, if I could believe that."

"It's true. I was dead until you came." He stood close to her but he did not touch her. Some instinct reined in his mounting eagerness. This was Enid's room. For the first time they had met in Enid's presence, and though he was without regret and could face the thought of her indifferently there were decencies to which they must pay homage.

"You are like my mother, too," he said brokenly, "for you have given me life."

She turned away, hiding her face from him, and he sat down at his table for the last time.

"I have a letter to write," he said. "Then we can go together."

He began to write.

"My dear Enid," and then sat with his pen in his hand waiting for the first well-balanced sentence as he waited for the first sentence of a new novel. It was difficult to write when one did not care. And he did not want to care.

Marie Barenoff stood by the fire. He could feel her presence as something holy in its mysteriousness. Suddenly she spoke.

"I've seen your wife, Lyn."

He sat quite still, not looking at her, grown deadly cold.

"I don't understand."

"I called on her. I wanted to see her for myself. I made some excuse, a foreign interviewer whose appointment you had forgotten. She laughed. She said you were so absorbed you were forgetting everything, even your own family. She made me come in and have tea with her, so that she could tell me how wonderful you are."

He stood up. He knew now of what he had been afraid. His instinct had warned him. She was a woman and could not rest till she had stirred up the nethermost depths of their emotions. There was to be battle between them before the final attainment,

his will against her conscience, her will abetting him. And yet as he saw her face he became aware of something deeper, more subtle.

"You shouldn't have gone," he said with forced calm, "it was not fair to you or to her or me. You are not the woman to come at the last with morbid doubts."

"No," she answered. "I am not. You need not be afraid of that. What is worth having is worth sinning for. I have my own morality. I am my own judge."

She was silent for a moment. And yet he stood and waited. A new tension had come into the atmosphere. He had a sudden urgent need to escape from this room quickly before it became unbearable. The room was a power, passive, immeasurably patient, working its will on him. Marie Barenoff had moved away from the fireside. She came opposite him, her hand resting on the table.

"Lyn, what lies beyond this for us both?"

He shook his head.

"I don't understand."

"Beyond this mystery. We feel now that we have got to solve it at all costs. But when it is done, when I have found out that you are just a man with a man's sins and follies, when you have found that I am just another faulty woman, what will remain to us?"

The answer sprang triumphantly to his lips.

"Love!"

It was as though he had said something extra-

ordinary, had flung open a locked door through which passed a figure of grave immeasurable power. He saw Marie Barenoff's face, its whiteness, its look of tense recognition, as though she too had seen.

"You love your wife."

"Marie!"

He would have caught her in his arms, pressed her close to him so that she should not see. But a shrill clamour checked him. He stood stock still, lamed by a sense of an invisible disaster. It was like a hideous implacable voice. It jeered and threatened him.

He watched Marie Barenoff go to the instrument and take down the receiver. The stillness was almost as terrible, a pit of emptiness on the brink of which his mind reeled. He heard her voice at last, subdued, urgent.

"Yes, yes, he is here. What is it?"

A little far-off ghost answered. Suddenly she stood upright, looking at him.

"Lyn, it's terrible. Mrs. Roscoe."

He knew then. Instantly. He had known from the first moment. Enid. Something frightful. Enid. An accident. Death, perhaps. And he had forsaken her. She who had never forsaken him, never failed him. He had killed her, his comrade, his love. It was as though a hammer blow had smashed through the gaudy walls of the fantastic palace in which he had been living and a ruthless hand had dragged him out into the bitter wind of truth. He staggered, drunk with the fumes that had

befooled him, but sane, knowing himself. He sprang across the intervening space.

"What is it? What has happened? Why did you ring off? Oh, God!"

He was aware then, even in the midst of his hatred of her, of her pregnant quiet. She was not looking at him but past him, and her face, deadly white, was still and watchful like the face of a spectator.

He turned. It was Enid standing in the open doorway.

Very strange she seemed in that room. Very big. She wore the sables that he had given her on her last birthday, and there was something royal about her. She made them both foolish and a little like children who have been caught in the midst of some petty struggle. He thought, "All our lives we shall seem to ourselves squalid and bedraggled."

"I—I hoped I'd find you, Lyn. I asked the caretaker to ring up. I wanted to see the room, since——"

She had been a little dazzled by the light. Now she saw them both. There was nothing outward to betray them but their naked pain. The room was disrupted, shattered by it. Very slowly she came forward and sat down, looking from one to the other.

"Oh, I'm sorry—I'm sorry. Oh, Lyn."

She sat so upright, so splendid still, so good, with no reproach. Her gloved hand resting on the table began to move in the little unconscious tattoo

which had once exasperated him. Now it seemed only infinitely pathetic. It completed her reality. It spoke to him of their life together. It pleaded for toleration as she gave forgiveness. He met her eyes for an instant, those generous, quiet eyes that had never hardened against him, never narrowed in cruelty or baseness. He saw in them the old familiar look.

"I understand. I must understand. He is different. He must have his heart's desire."

And beyond that he saw her suffering. He had said that she could not suffer as he suffered. This confounded him. It made everything that he had endured or written of endurance petty and insignificant. Yet it was so quiet. She did not break under it. She faced it as she had faced poverty and would face death, with her head up, thinking of how others might be spared. She was bigger than he would ever be.

"My wife!" he thought.

He could think of nothing else. An infinite thankfulness, humble and unreasoning, possessed him. A moment before he had thought of her as dead, beyond the reach of his love and his repentance. She was there. His heart knelt before her. Whether she forgave or not she should believe that he had loved once and for ever. She would know, as he knew now, that like trees that stand apart, stirred by strange winds, lifting a different foliage to the sky, their roots, in secret and in darkness, had been woven together for all time.

"You—you are going away together? You love one another, don't you?"

He said, "Yes," simply, mechanically. He gave no sign of the realisation that had fallen in a blasting stroke upon the moment's exultation. He had smashed his life and hers. Truth must be sacrificed to a lie. Honour demanded it. Honour demanded that he should lie dishonourably to his days' end. He could not look at her. He was the sinner on whom she was to pass judgment and there must be no defence.

"No," Marie Barenoff said. "That is not true. I love him. But he was only in love with a memory. He wanted to re-live something that can never be re-lived."

She came forward into the light. It seemed odd that he should have ever thought of her as a princess. The mystery that had enveloped her personality like a gaily coloured cloud was gone. He did not love or hate her. She was some one who pitied him and whom he pitied, a fellow-traveller, neither very wise or strong, not splendid at all but rather shabby and pathetic.

But she was trying to lift him out of his shame so that he could think hereafter of her and of this moment without bitterness.

"He will want to go away with me still because he is a man of honour and it is me he has wronged, not you. But I am a woman of honour too, in my own way. I do not take what is not mine." She looked at Enid. "You will understand."

She passed him quickly, going towards the door. But Enid stretched out her hand. It was taken and held for a long moment. They did not seem to be thinking of him, but of each other and of something that they both knew—at once a little laughable and very sad like a child's grief.

Then Marie Barenoff was gone.

Long after they still sat by the dying fire, his hand in hers. And what one human being can tell another he had told her. Presently, worn out, he knelt beside her, his head against her breast, and she spoke, almost for the first time, brokenly, like some one whose thought has been torn out of their very depths, who has always found it difficult to speak.

"It may be that it is God we seek so hungrily in one another," she said, "something unknown and greater than we. But we are just human beings who can only love one another. I am just the woman who loves you."

He answered humbly.

"It is enough."

And she held him close to her, looking into the fire and smiling a little through her tears.

THE END